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Children of Far Cathay



By

Charles Halcombe

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CHILDREN OF FAR CATHAY



TO
SIR ROBERT HART, G.C.M.G.,
INSPECTOR-GENERAL OF CUSTOMS, PEKING
ALSO TO
ALEXANDER RENNIE, M.A., M.B., C.M.,
THIS WORK IS MOST RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED
IN RECOGNITION OF THEIR MANY
KINDNESSES TO THE AUTHOR WHILE HE WAS
IN THE FAR EAST



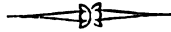
CHILDREN OF FAR CATHAY

A SOCIAL AND POLITICAL NOVEL

BY

CHARLES J. H. HALCOMBE

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PREFACE

IN this work I have endeavoured to give a true and unexaggerated description of the domestic life of the Chinese; of the ideas, customs and superstitions which influence and characterise them; of the unique and artistic beauty of their architecture; and particularly of the cruel system of bondage and extortion imposed upon them by their present rulers. The quaint tales, legends and proverbs related herein are essentially Oriental, and are in daily use among the people of the "Middle Kingdom"; indeed, without them this would not be a faithful delineation of Chinese life and character. The religious and political arguments advanced by the various characters introduced in the story do not necessarily coincide with the author's opinions, but are given as purely from a Chinese point of view.

When discussing the interesting problems relative to the present crisis in the Far East, I have frequently heard people speculate as to whether Japan entertains any real sympathy for the Chinese. She certainly evinces an outward and apparently genuine interest in the welfare and integrity of the Manchu-Tartar dynasty, and is not unmindful of its ultimate fate; but she really cherishes a warm fellow-feeling for the

hereditary Chinese, by whom these sentiments are fully reciprocated—a fellow-feeling which it is perhaps good policy for them to conceal until such times as it can be manifested to their mutual advantage.

Mark the aid and protection given to the late Korean rebel and reformer, Kim-liao-Kiang, whose assassination at the hands of the Chinese Government provoked a war between those countries; and mark the generous hospitality extended to Dr. Sun Yat Sen and other patriotic and enlightened “Sons of Han” who, in their commendable endeavours to bring about the much-needed social and political reformation of the Celestial Empire, have been obliged to fly from the ruthless sword of the arbitrary tyrants who have usurped the throne of the Ming Emperors.

The Chinese regard their enterprising neighbour in much the same light as we do our Colonial and American kindred; not only as staunch confederates, but as a primogenial branch of the same parent-tree. And when taking into consideration the remarkable resemblance, if not affinity, between these two nations—in their manners, customs, weapons, religion, pictorial art, written characters, human features, and also in their dress—for the silken robes and elaborate head-dress worn by a Chinese lady of a thousand years ago were of a style almost identically the same as that of a Japanese lady of to-day—we must, with all due deference to Dai Nippon’s charmingly original little story of the loves of the race-founding god and goddess, Iza-na-gi and Iza-na-mi, admit that this claim of relationship is based upon something more substantial than mere tradition,

But China is an unhappy country, and her children pine for the freedom and tranquillity which once made her great among many great nations, and prosperous in the enjoyment of the abundant mineral wealth and fruitfulness of her soil, and in the exceeding thriftiness and intelligence of her sons. Like the Israelites of old when in the land of Egypt, they now groan under the cruel yoke of the taskmaster, and seek respite and recreation in looking back upon the glories of a remote past and in gazing towards the unexplored wilderness of futurity, beyond which may lie the promised land of their emancipation. For the iron-shod heel of the Manchu-Tartar presses heavily upon the half-broken necks of these poor sorrowing slaves, who patiently work and await the advent of some great and dauntless spirit—such a one as the Tien-Wang or Chung-Wang of the Taipings—who will lead them to freedom and beneath whose standard they may rally, strong in the blessed hope of redeeming their stricken, impoverished land, even though each acre be purged with their own life-blood.

The Chinaman may well be antiquated in his ideas and retrograde in his thoughts and movements, for to him the present is pregnant with sorrow, and the future full of forlorn hopes and dark forebodings; so he would fain wander back along the mist-enshrouded way of by-gone years—back to bask in the peace and sunshine of old-world dynasties, when the western civilisations of to-day were struggling through the dark ages of their existence, and China was in the plenitude of her power and magnificence. Back to the glorious days of the Tang dynasty when the Arabians traded

along the beautiful coast of Fuhkien and Kwangtung; when the Persians sought the friendship of the wise and mighty Empress Wu, the august "Daughter of Heaven," to whose wide possessions Korea was now added; when the Greek Emperor Theodosius sent an envoy (A.D. 644) to the Court of "Far Cathay," with presents of costly fabrics and gems of priceless worth; and when the naval and mercantile fleets of this vast empire held undisputed sovereignty over the far eastern seas, and her great junks boldly fared forth on distant expeditions across the Indian Ocean to Africa's golden strand. These were the dreamy, halcyon days of China's summer, when her greatest poets and statesmen lived, and when no cloud dimmed the glory of her sky.

But, by a strange irony of fate, the decline and downfall of empires may invariably be traced to the same simple cause. They force their way to the forefront of other nations, and, in the day of their power and prosperity, do not realise the fatal weakness of human vanity, and so fall beneath the blighting shadow of fancied security. It was thus with China, and after the summer of her good fortune, the autumn came with the rise and fall of the Mongol power, and passed with the feudal division of her states, finally giving place to the long dark winter of grief and humiliation which set in with the suicide of the last of the Ming emperors, and the usurpation of the throne by their old, old enemy who swept upon them from the bleak lands of the North—whence come all the rapacious foes of that archaic empire—and, after many sanguinary conflicts and long campaigns, finally crossed the Great Wall which had been built over

hill and dale and desert to keep these Tartars out.

Thus ended the dynasty of the Mings; thus perished, in his weakness and incompetence, the last of the Chinese rulers; and he was reverently laid in his grave in the honourable company of his forefathers—side by side with the great Yun-lo, "the perfect ancestor and literary emperor," and the rest of the immortal thirteen—who sleep in the sacred silence of the far-famed Shih-Sen-ling, in whose gloomy grandeur and amidst whose marble steps and balustrades and colossal pillars of polished teakwood, probably brought from the forest aisles of distant Burma to grace this splendid mausoleum, and amidst the sacrificial perfumes of garoo and sandalwood, the shades of the mighty dead still linger and hold sway, paternally wielding over the vanquished Children of Han a sceptre more lasting, more dominant than any mortal one.

After the subjugation of the unfortunate "Celestials," who were compelled to degrade themselves by shaving their heads and wearing their hair in a queue in token of their servitude, the merchant princes of Old Cathay hid what was left of their riches, and, discarding their embroidered robes of silk, put on beggarly clothes; nor did they lack good cause for this precaution, since wealth was a sure attraction to the lawless dispenser of law, under whose jurisdiction their very birthright often became a menace to their safety and welfare; and so it is to-day—hence the apparent poverty of the most prosperous. The surviving members of the Ming family and their faithful adherents now sought refuge in Kwang-si and Kwang-tung, the two most southerly provinces of the empire, which had always been inhabited by a brave, intelligent

and unsubmissive race. Consequently these provinces became the cradle of many anti-dynastic secret societies, among the most powerful of these being the Sam Hop Win, or Triad Society, which has sworn to sooner or later expel the present rulers from the "Dragon Throne."

Four centuries passed, and then came the great outbreak of the Christian Taipings in Kwang-si and Kwang-tung, when the revolutionary fraternities of the south were brought together and welded into one great fighting machine by the superior genius and daring of Hung-sui-tshuen and his illustrious cousin and compatriot, Hung-yin—subsequently known as the Tien Wang and Chung Wang, who traced their descent back to the famed Sung dynasty. The Cantonese rose to a man, and they had almost completed the reconquest of China when the wily Imperialists contrived, by lightly-held promises, to enlist the support of our arms. Moreover, they reminded us of the fact that, if the insurgents became masters of their own country, we should lose the large indemnity then owing, and also our opium trade—that pernicious drug being prohibited, under penalty of death, by the Taipings. But, on the other hand, Soochow, the Venice and silk emporium of the Middle Kingdom, and the rich districts of the interior, would have been, and actually were, thrown open to foreign trade and intercourse, and our missionaries welcomed as "brothers of the great White Queen." For the true Chinese are not, and never have been, naturally hostile to the people of Great Britain, but it is the policy of their present rulers to keep them in ignorance of our aims and institutions, and to foster enmity against

us by misrepresenting the purpose of our missionaries; for the Manchu-Tartars know full well that, once western enlightenment and civilisation find their way into the jealously-guarded interior, the mandarin will no longer be able to sell justice to the highest bidder, to fleece the rich civilian, and to live in princely opulence on the helpless stupidity of his servile slaves, to whom light and independence are strictly denied.

However, the rebellion was crushed, the Taipings were practically exterminated, men, women, and children being put to the sword, and the unfortunate survivors sank back into even greater misery and degradation; while the Government made doubly sure of its prey by placing a Tartar garrison in every city of importance throughout the length and breadth of the land. Nevertheless, the downtrodden embers of freedom are still smouldering in those southern provinces, and will one day burst forth into a vehement flame; and when a prince of the royal house of Old Cathay once more ascends the throne of his ancestors the secret brotherhood between Japan and China will be manifested. And then, if the great tidal wave of the western world still threatens to inundate those shores, it will be rolled back beyond the boundaries of the Far East.

CHARLES J. H. HALCOMBE.

HERNE BAY, KENT, November, 1904.



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Extract from the "Literary World," June 10th, 1898.

MR. CHARLES J. H. HALCOMBE's career, to which we have briefly alluded as 'very adventurous since his nineteenth year,' was not lacking in incident even before that period. He had made five voyages, been twice shipwrecked, and had passed through a mutiny at sea on board the barque *Portland*, ere he became of age. As some people have hinted at the apocryphal nature of his adventures, Mr. Halcombe has submitted to our inspection a certificate of discharge from the *Poseidon*, made out in his name in August, 1885, in which his age is stated as twenty, and also a certificate from the General Register and Record Office of Shipping and Seamen, London, dated July 7, 1884, giving details of four previous voyages, and mentioning his shipwrecks. Referring to an entry against the last record, he says:—

"You will notice that the indentures were 'cancelled by mutual consent,' when I had only four or five months more to serve. Well, I joined a vessel, and had a strange presentiment that she would be lost. So I refused to sail in her, thus escaping a third shipwreck in a ship which would never return. Instead of sailing in her, I went out to Australia and travelled into Gippsland, and then further northward. Returning home, I became a contributor to *The Globe*, my first article, written at the age of twenty, being 'The Old Place,' and was followed by 'Cape Life as it Was,' etc. Then I went out to Africa, and travelled considerably, and from there proceeded in a little German barquentine out to China. My life and adventures in China, where my life was heroically saved by a young Chinese lady who is now my wife, were recorded in my work, 'The Mystic Flowery Land,' published by Luzac and Co., at 16s., in 1896, with numerous illustrations."

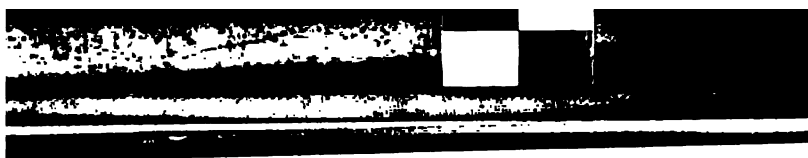
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CHILDREN OF FAR CATHAY

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

A young girl, passingly fair, and, I regret to say, equally fickle, and a dark and somewhat tall young man, well set, though slender, and decidedly handsome, were standing together in an old-fashioned garden bordering upon the Lancashire coast. I may add that it was a pleasant spot, from which a glimpse of the distant sea was obtainable on that sultry July morning, in the year 1896, of which I am speaking.

Laura Rashley and Herbert Montrose were the names of the aforesaid persons, and they were facing one another with hands clasped, as if in the act of leave-taking. She was looking rather perplexed, and perhaps a little penitent, while he was regarding her fixedly and rather solemnly, and neither of them had spoken for some moments.

"Well, Laura," he at length said, speaking in a kind, manly voice, "as you remarked, I have been absent a considerable time, and, judging from what you have said, I presume that you grew tired of waiting and finally transferred your affections elsewhere. However, I thank you for having spoken frankly to me, for it has saved me much uncertainty.

I will not spoil the pleasantness of our meeting by reproaching you, nor will I detain you much longer. All I have to add is that I hope your future life will be happy and prosperous."

"Indeed, Herbert," she said nervously, "I am sorry, very sorry for you."

"You are most sympathetic, Laura," he answered rather ironically, "but I do not wish you to pity me, for there are many pursuits in this world upon which to concentrate one's thoughts and energies—good and ennobling pursuits which wean us from the selfish sorrows of life."

Having said this, he pressed her hand and, saying good-bye, turned from her and walked away.

When he had gone, this foolish young lady began to feel remorseful, and probably for the first time she realised what a worthy fellow he really was. She would have called him back, but, being ashamed to do so, threw herself down upon a seat and collapsed into tears; and thus they parted.

* * * * *

Montrose had been serving for some years in the British Government service of India, and on landing in England was grieved to hear that his father, who resided at Arch Hall, near Canterbury, in the county of Kent, had suddenly died, leaving him practically alone in the world, though possessed of a goodly heritage. Then he sought the young girl whose memory he had honourably cherished during his absence, but only to be sorely disappointed in the discovery that she had already bestowed her affections upon another.

One Sunday morning, only a day or two after his sad interview with Miss Rashley, Montrose

drove over to old Herne Church, where his parents had often taken him when he was a boy. The simple time-worn edifice seemed to have a soothing influence upon his restless and troubled mind, and brought back to his memory past days—the irresponsible days of happy youth, when the future was a broad pathway gilded with bright fancies and golden prospects. As it happened, the preacher was a missionary from China, a worthy, over-zealous man, who had spent twenty years of his life among the Chinese, and was anxious to enlist the support and sympathy of his countrymen in the Christian cause.

The service played a memorable and important part in the young man's life. He had hitherto, from a very early age, showed a strong inclination to enter the army, and while in India had received some military training in a volunteer corps; but his parents, particularly his father, had always resolutely opposed, and in every way discouraged, his martial ardour; so, like a dutiful son, he had respected their wishes. But now a new and legitimate field for his enterprise and love of travel was unfolded to him, and with the impulsiveness of dejection and the freedom of loneliness, he determined to follow in the footsteps of this worthy minister.

"How could I better honour the memory of my dear father and mother?" he said to himself, half rising from his seat, as if to openly avow his intention, and trembling in the excitement and inspiration of the moment as he made this solemn resolve.

When the service was over and the congregation had dispersed, he went into the vestry, and in a few words told the preacher that he had decided to become a missionary.

The good man looked surprised and yet pleased at this tall and handsome young fellow, though he seemed to hardly credit his assertion. However, the Rev. Montague Williams, for such was the missionary's name, promised to call at Arch Hall on the following morning, which he did, and before the end of the week Herbert Montrose had resigned his appointment in the Government service.

* * * * *

It was a calm, sunshiny morning. The sun came flickering through the swaying foliage of giant oaks, and casting its beams upon the mullioned windows of Arch Hall. It was the dawn of an eventful day—a day which would be remembered by the humble folk who lived in the old village of Sturry, and would be solemnly entered in the unwritten annals of that quiet place.

Although the hour was early, many people were passing along the drive which led to the Hall. Old and young were there, quietly standing about the door with their market-baskets full of fresh-gathered flowers; for they had come to pay their parting respects and offer their little tokens of gratitude to the son of the old squire, who had performed many acts of kindness in his time to these poor villagers. At length the carriage came ambling along from the stables and stopped before the front entrance. Then all those good people of Sturry gathered about the conveyance and put divers questions to the old retainer who grasped the reins; for only a few days ago they had buried their benevolent patron and had welcomed home the son, and now the latter was going away again.

Montrose had already made his last round of

inspection, had visited all the familiar retreats of boyhood days, and now moved slowly through the broad hall where many fine faces seemed to smile tenderly from their gilded frames and connote a long farewell. He lingered for some time among these old heirlooms, as if to imprint them upon his memory, and then passed out through the porch and stood upon the steps.

He appeared to be much moved by the sincere manifestations of respect and goodwill paid him by the simple-hearted throng outside, many of whom had known him as a boy; and, with uncovered head, he thanked them for their kindly feeling, and expressed a hope that all the friendly ties that now existed when parting, would still remain unchanged in absence and be gladly renewed when meeting. Then entering the carriage he bowed good-bye, and soon afterwards Arch Hall and the peaceful village were left behind among the sacred haunts of the past.



CHAPTER I

THE NEW YEAR

I must ask the reader to accompany me in imagination to that vast and remote "pagan land" grandiloquently called the "Celestial Empire," of whose inhabitants we know so little, and which, even to this day, remains shrouded in almost impenetrable mystery. My story opens in the small city of Lien in the province of Kwang-tung, about one hundred and thirty miles to the north-west of Canton. In this world-forgotten place the tide of human life had flowed for generations and generations uninterrupted by western civilisation, and unintruded upon by the noisy, hurrying footsteps of the much feared and despised *fang-quai*, or "foreign devil," as Europeans are universally denominated in China; so that everything remained in a primitive state of somnolent tranquillity characteristic of Oriental life, the very walls and buildings exhaling an odour of incalculable antiquity and imparting an air of respectable decay.

The city was entirely encompassed by a wall and was oval in shape, and crossed at right-angles by two main streets which ran from gate to gate, the position of the latter corresponding as usual with

the four cardinal points of the compass. These thoroughfares were lined on either side with shops, in front of which were suspended long, black and vermilion-coloured signboards and glazed paper lanterns with the proprietor's name and trade painted thereon in large gold, yellow or black characters. But now the shops were closed, and fluttering from each post, shutter and lintel were numerous oblong-shaped red papers speckled with gold; while sheaves of lighted "joss-sticks," placed on either side of the doorways and windows perfumed the air with odours of sandalwood and garoo, and were intended to propitiate the good spirits and pacify any evil ones which might be hovering about with questionable intentions.

The Chinese fully believe that the earth is peopled with an infinite variety of supernatural beings, good, bad and indifferent, by whom the destinies of all mortals are liable to be influenced. These must either be liberally bribed or thoroughly scared—hence the incessant firing of crackers, accompanied by sounds of revelry, which could now be heard,—for the simple-minded inhabitants of Lien were celebrating, with all due noise and display, the one great national holiday—the New Year. Had it not been for the crowds of gaily-dressed pedestrians and the sound of mirthful voices, the streets would have been unusually dismal and still, for no cart, 'bus or truck ever rattles over the roads of an inland Chinese city; and although at intervals one may be startled by the sharp musketry of fire-crackers, there is not the least possibility of being permanently deafened or periodically distracted by the shrill screech of a whistle, the rush or rumble of a train, or,

worse still, the heinous music of a barrel organ or German band.

The sights and sounds of the Far East entirely, and often appreciably, differ from those of the West. In China you seldom see a drunken man, and from sunrise to sunset the only sounds heard are the occasional clatter of a horse's hoofs, the tinkle of mule-bells, the droning voice of a pedlar, or the hollow tap of his bamboo castanet, the sharp bark of a dog, the almost silent tread of straw-sandalled chair bearers, or burdened coolies, and the drowsy squeaking of a strangely-fashioned wheelbarrow which carries passengers as well as goods. The long sultry days and Sundayless weeks pass silently, slowly and uneventfully away into centuries, without the least visible change; for nothing less than an earthquake or revolution will even faintly ruffle the smooth surface of Chinese domestic life. When disturbed, however, it soon composes and reconsolidates itself; and its would-be reformers are apt to find themselves gradually immersed in, and eventually engulfed by, one of the most ancient and ingenious civilisations the world has ever known.

In the centre of the city stood the Taotai's yamen, which we shall visit later on, and near it were the abodes of the principal residents, among whom was one Mr. Hung Fong, a retired rice merchant, who occupied a large but secluded corner-house situated nearly opposite the city temple and at the side of the market-place. As the Hung family is destined to play an important part in these pages, we will proceed to enter their abode and make their acquaintance; for the China New Year is a very appropriate and auspicious

time for so doing—at least, so the wise people of the “Middle Kingdom” have led me to believe.

When building his house, Mr. Hung Fong had refrained from giving it a pretentious aspect outside, being desirous of having a palatial abode without the least exterior display: the sort of place that an avaricious mandarin would pass without much likelihood of his inherent curiosity or covetousness being aroused—a precaution which any Chinese civilian of means would duly appreciate and understand. Consequently a very poor idea of the interior of the building was given by the outside architecture, which merely consisted of a moderately high mud and mortar wall and a solid wooden door, which opened into a somewhat squalid-looking yard, paved with cobble-stones and flanked by three small box-like rooms in which the chair and house coolies were lodged. Several of the former, dressed in plain blue dungaree clothes and wearing immense mushroom-like bamboo sun hats, could be seen lolling about, some smoking long, thin-stemmed pipes with tiny bowls, only capable of holding a pinch of the hay-like tobacco they smoke, and others firing off strings of crackers. Though a winter month, the weather was warm, and their legs and feet were quite bare except for a pair of straw sandals, which were only intended to protect the soles of the feet.

Crossing the yard you come to a roofed building, or lodge, with a plain, slate-coloured brick wall pierced in the centre by a small but massive door, which was strictly guarded by a venerable-looking porter named Ho Tai, an old and trusty retainer, who was dressed in silken holiday attire.

He lived in the narrow space betwixt the two walls which formed a barrier between the outer and inner premises. Having passed through the first door, you took a few steps forward and were confronted by a large, double-leaved wooden gate through which you were ushered into a spacious courtyard, open in the centre to the sky and paved with red tiles. Arrived here, the severe simplicity which had hitherto characterised the architecture was succeeded by unmistakable indications of wealth and affluence.

On either side of the open space were five roomy offices, shaded by the far-spreading foliage of a species of oak with white syringa-like blossoms which diffused an odour of violets, and across it a walk of tessellated pavement, ornamented on either side by rows of high blue and green coloured flower stands, led to a broad flight of granite steps which extended along the entire frontage of an introductory building, the bricks of which were of an indigo-blue colour, evenly pointed in mortar, and in places decorated with skilfully-chiselled mouldings. Those steps ascended to a long but incapacious terrace, tastefully decorated with earthenware and china pots, holding a choice collection of tropical plants and ferns intermixed with varicoloured flowers. The curving eaves of the roof, which were supported by curiously carved pillars of stone, projected sufficiently to quite shelter this terrace, in the centre of which was a large wooden gateway painted red and in places richly gilded. This was the *donjon* of Hung Fong's castle, and when these portals, and the similarly constructed inner ones were passed, the scene that presented itself was quite enchanting.

Up to the present the eye had only encountered the usual signs of wealth and respectability distinguishing the residence of a Chinese gentleman of position, but now his luxurious refinement and elegant tastes became more apparent and profuse at each forward step.

In front of you lay a commodious garden-like enclosure with here and there small buildings, most of which were under separate roofs. These were surrounded by artistically designed pieces of rockwork, and shaded by leafy trees, overhanging creepers and clumps of graceful bamboos, which waved their feathery plumes to the softest airs; while a miniature lake, where gold-fish sported and splashed, completed the beauty of the sylvan scene. To the right, nestling among dark glossy foliage interspersed with purplish-pink blossoms, stood the reception hall, the outer walls of which were ornamented with large medallion-like pictures of flowers, fruits, and birds. The interior was paved with fine marble tiles, the furniture comprising a *kang*, or raised platform with a table and two armchairs,* several elaborately carved ebony chairs and settees with marble seats, a couple of round tables and four small console tables of similar workmanship and material; the walls being hung with oblong-shaped scrolls containing pictures illustrating historical and legendary scenes, and texts from the writings of Confucius and Lao-tsze. To the left of this building was the ancestral hall, the exterior walls of which were of blue-coloured brick,

* A friend is always conducted to this dais where he takes the seat of honour, which is on the left side of the host, the table, upon which tea is served, being between them.

elaborately decorated with rustic scenery done in stucco-work.

On entering this sacred edifice the eye at once fell upon a long altar, covered with gorgeously embroidered red cloth, and which occupied the centre of the opposite wall. Upon this were arranged the family tablets, a large image of the god of wealth—which generally received a proportionate amount of homage and heard the most devout invocations,—also a hideous impersonation of the Yeuk Wang, or creator of heaven and earth, and a number of smaller idols intended to represent the deities supposed to preside over the chief doors of the establishment. In front of these gilded “josses” were placed a varied assortment of lighted sacrificial candles made of red-coloured wax, and libations of pure Fokien tea, besides other offerings of sweet cakes, sugar-plums, melon seeds and boiled rice, with which to regale themselves during this festive season; while burning “joss sticks” enveloped them in clouds of fragrant smoke. Lying further back in this spacious inclosure were the sitting rooms and dining halls for the male and female members of the household; while the sleeping apartments of the latter were situated on a first floor, along the front of which ran a gauze-covered balcony. Most of these upstairs rooms, which were used exclusively by the ladies, communicated by means of sliding panels and by circular and pear-shaped doorways that pierced the wooden partitions which separated them. They were plainly but well furnished in the ordinary style, the floors being fancifully tiled, and in the centre covered with light matting bearing coloured designs; and the walls, though frescoed

in places, were only further decorated with a few scrolls. The Chinese are quite teutonic in the severe simplicity of their household paraphernalia which, however, is eminently adapted for the warmth of the climate, the ebony marble-seated chairs and settees being particularly cool and pleasant.

Standing in the middle of the reception-hall was a venerable but still handsome and stalwart man. His face was clean shaven, his features well defined, his eyes bright and large, and his countenance open and good natured; while his lofty brow and firm mouth betokened strength of intellect and character. This was the worthy Mr. Hung Fong—a typical son of Han, and a fine specimen of the simple-minded, home-loving, industrious men who from times immemorial have upheld the honour and dignity of a civilisation as ancient and ingenious as it is refined and unique. For many generations the Hung family had honourably lived and died in that city, and among its present inhabitants the wealthy rice merchant numbered almost as many relations as friends.

His outer dress consisted of a dark blue brocaded silk robe falling almost to the ankles, a chocolate-coloured jacket or *ma-kwa* of the same material, reaching a little below the waist, and a baggy pair of silken trousers tucked into white stockings, which were fastened below the knee with embroidered garters; his headgear being a black satin skull-cap surmounted by a red cord knob. The inner garment was drawn in round the waist by a broad yellow sash, the ends of which hung down the left side, adding to the picturesque *ensemble* of his attire, which was completed by a beautifully embroidered fan sheath suspended from the waist.

He was regarding, with anything but a complacent expression, a large, red-coloured visiting card that he had just received from the new Taotai of Lien, one Shun Ming, of Manchu-Tartar extraction, which would oblige him to call upon that official. For nearly half a century the taotais of that district had been natives of Kwang-tung, who had done their utmost to promote the welfare and happiness of the people by reducing the taxes and suppressing official bribery and extortion among their subordinate officers, thus allowing the inhabitants to enjoy the fruits of their labours in undisturbed tranquillity.

Under their equitable rule the city had prospered and risen to considerable prominence; and the temples, pagodas and other public buildings had been repaired and embellished, and were a credit to the place, particularly the two pagodas standing on the eastern and western hills outside the city, over which they were supposed to exercise a strongly beneficent influence. But the last of these good governors had recently died, and his successor—a northern official with a wide reputation for being superlatively tyrannical and avaricious—had now arrived with a large and ravenous-looking retinue. This had caused great consternation among the prosperous inhabitants, and not without good reason; for, under the present *régime* in China, these mandarins, who only receive nominal salaries, are allowed to obtain unlimited emolument, which many contrive to do by submitting the unfortunate civilians to a system of undue taxation which is very appropriately termed “squeezing.”

A youth now entered the apartment, and with

respectful obeisances approached Mr. Hung. His age was about seventeen, and in form and face he much resembled the elderly man, his eyes being large, fearless and bright, and his countenance pleasing, though decidedly intellectual and sedate; his carefully plaited queue of glossy hair almost touched the ground. As is common among the Cantonese, he had a face which would have been called strikingly handsome, even in England; for besides the regularity of his features, his complexion was delicate and fair without being in the least effeminate or unhealthy. This was Hung Fong Cheng, the merchant's only son and heir.

"Pardon my presumption, father," he said with marked deference, "but I perceive that you are not dressed as handsomely as you used to be during this festive season. It would be rude of me to inquire your motive for this change, as of course I feel convinced of its wisdom; nevertheless I am much concerned, since the yellow robe was more magnificent, and seemed to suit you most admirably."

"True, true, my observant son; but circumstances advise the change," replied the father, tapping him playfully on the shoulder with his fan, and significantly holding before him the Taotai's card. "For many years this neighbourhood has been blessed with a genial climate," he continued, speaking metaphorically,* and alluding to the new official; "but of late a cold blast from the frozen regions of the north has swept upon it. Even the oak, my son, sheds its bright foliage before the

* Metaphorical speech is much used and appreciated by the Chinese in their conversation, especially among the educated classes.—AUTHOR.

wintry breeze. I have done likewise. It is policy!"

Cheng quickly saw the point of the simile and looked thoughtfully and somewhat ruefully down at his own "bright foliage," which consisted of a long yellow robe of brocaded silk and a pale blue jacket; but in place of the skull-cap he wore a conical-shaped dress-hat surmounted by a gold nob or button, as it is called. Without saying another word he left the apartment, but soon reappeared in more sober attire, exactly resembling, except for the head-dress, that worn by his parent, who regarded him with approval. Cheng was a dutiful and promising son of whom his father was justly proud; for, although so young, he had already gained distinction as a scholar, having recently taken his first degree of *Sui-tsai* (budding genius), a distinction which raised him above the commoners, and which only nineteen others, all older than himself, out of three thousand had gained. This entitled him to wear the gold button and official cap which made his head-dress somewhat conspicuous, particularly for one of his years; and he was greatly respected by the people of Lien, who regarded him as a rising star. Being now eligible to compete at the triennial examination, held in the provincial capital, for the second degree of *Chow-jin* (promoted man), he was studying hard at home under a tutor famed for his learning.

As is customary on New Year's morning, Cheng had already paid his respects to his parents by prostrating himself at their feet while blessing and thanking them for their wise counsel and training, and wishing them long life, domestic bliss and prosperity. The servants of the establishment

now came in, one at a time, to do likewise. The ceremony was performed with great respect and solemnity by *kowtowing*, or kneeling upon the floor and bowing until their heads touched the ground, at the same time expressing their indebtedness and thanks to their employer, and wishing him and his family joy and good fortune during the ensuing year. Responding most affably, the worthy master and his son presented each with a red paper parcel containing a liberal gratuity in silver. After further reverential expressions of gratitude and goodwill, these healthy-looking retainers departed with smiling faces to repeat the operation in the presence of the female members of the family, and afterwards enjoy the holiday at their respective homes, a few remaining behind to perform the most necessary household duties until relieved by others, and so on to the end of the festive season.

When they had all retired, and the father and son were again alone, the former mechanically glanced at the Taotai's card, which he still held in his hand, and, pushing his jadestone bangles up his arm until they tightened upon it, commenced fanning himself vigorously.

"This questionable though polite token of benignity causes me some uneasiness, my son, as it necessitates our paying a formal call on His Excellency Shung Ming, who seems desirous of giving me the opportunity of making his acquaintance," he said, laying the paper aside and adding drily, "I am deeply conscious of the honour and obligation he confers upon me, his humble subject, but I do most devoutly petition the gods that he will not also condescend to extend his friendship

to my purse ; or I fear me he might make such a vast slit in the lining that it would be irreparable. But come, true gold fears no fire ; we will go forth together and pay our respects to the community,"

Leaving the apartment, they proceeded towards the entrance where sedan-chairs awaited them. These they dispensed with, however, for the simple reason that, being well known and much respected, they were likely to have to acknowledge so many salutations on the way that it would have obliged them to repeatedly stop the chairs and get out ; as in China it would be positively barbarous to remain seated in a conveyance when greeting anyone. So they sauntered along the road, each carrying a well-filled wad of visiting cards, which are composed of oblong-shaped pieces of red paper, between six and seven inches by three or four in size, with the name inscribed in large black characters. Every minute or so they paused to exchange elaborate civilities with some passing friend or acquaintance, by clasping the hands together and moving them up and down between the forehead and knees, at the same time making profound obeisances and saying, "*Gong-he far choi ! Gong-he far choi !*" (Good luck, get rich ! Good luck, get rich !"), which is essentially a new year greeting.

The first call they made was upon Mr. Hung Fong's brother, who kept a large medicine shop, and whose name was Hung Ling. The elder son was standing outside the front door letting off strings of fire-crackers, while a little brother assiduously grubbed among the smoking *débris* for the few that missed fire. Catching sight of their uncle and cousin, they both came forward

and "chin-chinned" in approved "Celestial" style, ushering them into the house where they were met by the father, a good-natured, portly person of medium height and fortune.

"*Gong-he far choi! Gcng-he far choi!* good brother. Yours is an auspicious first-foot," he said, making the usual obeisances and showing them into the reception-room, where a further ceremony was enacted, the young men reverently prostrating themselves before their uncles who assisted them to rise, and bestowed upon them their blessings finally exhorting them to grow in filial piety, virtue and industry.

The Chinese are very particular in the observance of their punctilious forms of etiquette, and even the children imitate the very looks and gestures of their sires. The little son of Han is a perfect chip of the old block; his dress is the exact cut, *pro rata portione*, of his father's, and like him he maintains an aspect of dignified composure in company, taking his pleasure gravely, yet enjoying it thoroughly. You see the little fellow clasping his small hands together and making his salutations with as much solemnity and *bienséance* as if the entire reputation of his family rested upon his correct performance of these ceremonies.

Before seating himself, Mr. Hung Fong gave each of his nephews a small red paper packet containing a few cash and some silver—this being a seasonable and auspicious offering,—telling them to buy sweets and crackers. His brother did likewise to Cheng, who was quite venerated by his less learned relations; and then a serving lad brought in tea and a lacquer-ware tray of sweetmeats, and he also received a gift from the visitors.

The elderly gentlemen now sat down, and opened a conversation by inquiring into one another's financial affairs, for in China all sublunary matters commence afresh with the New Year, when every debt is paid and all accounts "squared." The young people maintained a respectful silence, as is customary in the presence of elders, but did ample justice to the sugar-plums, dried laichees and other dainties over which they now and again contrived to express their sentiments in whispers.

After comparing notes and making a few comments upon the past year, the discourse of these two worthy citizens reverted to the all-important topic of the hour—the new Taotai of Lien. Both men exchanged significant glances and expressed grave fears for the future welfare of the city and its inhabitants, agreeing that the outlook was, from this one cause, far gloomier than it had been for many a long day.

After thus spending nearly an hour, Mr. Hung Fong and his son continued their round of visits, which took them to the homes of all sorts and conditions of people, for the rich and poor alike received the same courteous attention from the good merchant; indeed, the latter generally had substantial cause to feel grateful, for he made a rule of helping at this season his less fortunate brethren; and his poor relations always looked forward with much pleasure to his coming. From his brother's house he went to that of his cousin, one Hung Hoi, who was in very humble circumstances; chiefly owing, however, to an over indulgence in the opium-pipe, nearly all his property and even a large portion of his household goods having gone in smoke. This man was particularly

jealous of his thrifty and affluent cousin; but being covetous and crafty as well as weak-minded, he was careful to hide his antagonistic feelings, and gladly anticipated the open-hearted Fong's annual visit, by which he always benefited considerably.

The way to Hung Hoi's unpretentious residence led through an intricate maze of back streets and narrow, noisome alleys, inhabited by itinerant traders, coolies, and a peculiar class of people, who, without being beggars, precariously existed upon what others threw away; also by mangy-looking dogs which greeted any respectably-dressed person with snarls of disapproval and sundry snaps which were too suggestive of hydrophobia to be pleasant.

They found the object of their visit to that uninviting neighbourhood lolling against his door and conversing with a tardy little gentleman who was talking confidentially and gesticulating with his fan. As they approached he smilingly skipped away and Mr. Hung Hoi came forward smirking and bowing, and with a great show of cordiality ushered them into his domicile which was not much better than a hovel. A conglomeration of nauseating odours, chiefly consisting of stale opium and joss-stick fumes, met them as they passed through the dark passage and into the poorly furnished room, the chief article of which was a raised dais covered with red cloth, greasy from age and wear, and provided with two embroidered bolsters very much tarnished, a couple of small lamps, two trays and a bamboo opium pipe. This was where the host invited his particular cronies to recline with him and imbibe the tranquillising drug.

Standing upon the window sill, in striking contrast with the dingy surroundings, was a large

glazed bowl partly filled with pebbles, from among which grew a beautiful narcissus plant in full bloom. This was much prized by the owner and had been tended carefully and superstitiously by him; for the Chinese universally believe that if the flower opens during the new year it is predictive of good luck, and they watch and cultivate it with an affectionate simplicity which is quite charming. Hung Hoi's childlike fondness for this flower was one of his few redeeming points, for he was anything but a moral man. Indeed, I should not have presumed to introduce such an obscure and disreputable individual to the reader by recording Hung Fong's visit to him, were not his intrigues destined to soon bring him conspicuously into the foreground; and as such is the case I may as well briefly describe his personal appearance. He was of medium height and about fifty years of age, with a thin but wiry form, for he had been a strong, stalwart man in his earlier days, and what he now lacked in physical strength was more than counterbalanced by the growing activity of his mind, which was plainly manifested by his nervous manner and the restlessness of his bright, piercing eyes. In many respects he was a dangerous character, and it was rumoured abroad that he was the headman of one of those thieves' guilds which are common in every town and city in China.*

It is hardly necessary to say that Hung Fong's visit to this scrubby relative was of a purely chari-

* It is a system of brigandage which is winked at and even supported by the Manchu officials, who receive their annual "squeeze-money" from the headman, or chief of the guild. When people are robbed they go to the headman of the thieves' guild, and by paying him a sum, varying in proportion to the value of the goods stolen, are able through his mediumship to recover the things.

table nature and of short duration; and it was with a sense and sigh of relief that he and his son left the house and once more breathed an atmosphere which—though far from pure—was infinitely preferable to the fulsome one just endured.

On emerging into one of the main thoroughfares, Hung Fong expressed his intention of next visiting the Taotai, whereupon Cheng begged to be excused accompanying him there, as he was desirous of paying his respects to his venerable tutor. As this request was amiably complied with, they parted; and so for the present we will follow the movements of the father, leaving the son to pursue an opposite course.



CHAPTER II

THE MOUTH OF A BUDDHA AND THE HEART OF A SNAKE

As I explained previously, the Taotai's yamen was situated in the centre of the city, and near the market-place, and, like most other official residences in China, was fronted by a large open quadrangle. On either side of this stood a lofty flagstaff, near the top of which was a square wooden structure like a trough, from which protruded a ragged array of sticks and twigs forming the nests of several families of crows that kept the neighbourhood alive by their incessant wrangling and cawing. As Hung Fong passed one of the flagstaffs, from the top of which fluttered an oblong-shaped white flag, ornamented with large black characters, these birds commenced making such an ominous noise that he involuntarily paused at the foot of the broad flight of granite steps leading to the gateway, and seemed half inclined to turn back and postpone the visit.

But sharp eyes were already upon him, for a number of soldiers, runners and other retainers were lolling about the terrace above; so, not wishing to attract undue attention or arouse suspicion, he ascended the steps—though not without superstitious forebodings of coming evil—and approached

the entrance. On either side the outer walls were covered with notices and hung with red boards containing the titles held and degrees taken by the *taipan** residing there; while the immense folding doors, which now stood open, were gaudily embellished with coloured pictures representing fierce-looking genii treading upon white clouds, and mythological beasts of equally ferocious aspect.

As he was about to enter the building one of the runners—a cadaverous-looking, insolent fellow of Tartar extraction—swaggered forward and, demanding his business, informed him that he did not think His Excellency Shun Ming would be able to grant him an interview.

Being well versed in the cunning artifices of these *ex-officio* pests, Hung Fong assumed a deferential air and respectfully tendered him a twenty-cent piece, which was received with a depreciative grunt of toleration, and the knave hurried away to communicate with a confederate who acted in the capacity of gatekeeper, but who was now absent from his post engaged in a game of dominoes in one of the side offices, from whence proceeded unmistakeable sounds of revelry. The gatekeeper soon emerged from a side door and, pausing near the inner gate, beckoned Hung Fong forward, at the same time surveying him with critical severity. This minion of the yamen also assumed an air of grave responsibility calculated to impress the intruder with his importance, and the advisability of enlisting his assistance; and with a view to obtaining a considerable “squeeze” he likewise began interrogating at length. But a further expenditure of breath was

* Great man.

saved by a still more liberal gratuity, and he allowed the polite civilian to pass the first barrier, and be further fleeced: for in China the nearer you approach the sacred precincts of a yamen the more heavily your purse is likely to suffer, particularly during such a festive season as the new year, when all the tag-rag and bobtail of Officialdom are at leisure and on the alert for any pickings that may come in their way; and civilians are regarded as legitimate prey by all who come under the category of government servants, from the viceroy down to the lowest yamen runner.

Hung Fong now entered a courtyard paved with red tiles and flanked by a number of small rooms used by clerks and other functionaries, several of whom were sitting upon a marble seat beneath the ample foliage of a species of chestnut tree, which stood on the right-hand side of the central walk that was composed of tessellated pavement. They did not molest the visitor, who walked forward towards another flight of granite steps extending transversely across the front of a second building, which was profusely decorated with stucco-work paintings. He had not proceeded far, however, when he noticed two more churlish-looking personages advancing to meet him.

"Sampled by wolves, for the lion to devour!—A pest on the rogues!" he murmured softly, fabricating a pleasant smile and again resorting to the infallible and no less inevitable *passe partout* by producing his pouch and with great deference tendering each some pieces of silver. Although he had to pay through the nose for a visit he would gladly have avoided, and though fearful of the future, he infinitely preferred bearding the

lion in its den, to having it prowling about his door with questionable intentions. He was an astute man and knew that it would not have been prudent had he failed to thus personally acknowledge the doubtful compliment paid him by the new Taotai; though he had good reason to believe that it had not been done purely out of unselfish politeness or neighbourly feeling: virtues that are somewhat rare among Manchu-Tartar officials.

He was escorted up the steps and shown through two immense folding-doors, which closed behind him, and he found himself in yet another though smaller courtyard, on either side of which were several incapacious offices and a covered walk, and in front a raised platform upon which rested the inner range of buildings comprising the chief apartments of the yamen. These were respectively covered by artistically ornamented tiers of high-pitched roofs with overhanging eaves that were supported by sculptured columns of wood and stone. The platform was surrounded by an exquisitely chiselled balustrade of white marble, and was approached by several narrow flights of steps, both being tastefully decorated with glazed pots containing gems of horticultural art in the shape of curiously dwarfed trees and delicately grafted flowers, while the far-spreading foliage of an oak threw a grateful shade around.

In this enclosure a number of petty mandarins, evidently belonging to the Taotai's retinue, were standing and conversing in the Pekinese dialect. Their manner, which was abrupt and excitable, and their speech were alike characteristic of northern Chinese, their discourse being emphasised by sharp and vigorous taps, sweeps and strokes of the fan,



which in the "Middle Kingdom" is used for a variety of purposes by male and female alike, and with a Son of Han takes the place of a walking-stick. The cook uses it for culinary purposes—to keep his charcoal fire alight and cool the *congee*,—the blacksmith employs it in place of bellows, the chair-coolie, after a tiring run, reduces his temperature to a normal state with it, the devoted wife deftly manipulates it when driving the mosquitoes from her husband's couch, or when wafting him into peaceful slumbers and ethereal dreams; while the ingenious *amah* makes it answer sundry useful purposes—to fan the restless baby to sleep, to flick the flies from its chubby face, and to remove the dust from the furniture—and, moreover, she often converts it into a sunshade by pinning it on her head.

Crossing the yard, Hung Fong ascended the central flight of steps, where he was met by a *tingchai*,* to whom he handed his card, asking him to present it to the Taotai. Having also feed this man, he was ushered into a spacious ante-chamber, where he found congregated a number of other visitors, mostly well-to-do merchants and tradespeople, evidently awaiting in nervous expectancy their turn to be presented to His Excellency. They were standing about in a very sheepish manner, spasmodically opening and closing their fans, and fitfully using them to hide their confusion, which was painfully apparent, and were looking so disconsolate and concerned that one would have surmised that they were about to attend the funeral of some near and dear relative,

* A letter-carrier and messenger.

or to perform some equally sad and solemn function; while one and all seemed too occupied with their own individual anxieties to converse except in subdued whispers when exchanging civilities with some new arrival.

As Hung Fong smilingly entered the apartment, his manly presence and genial manner—for though a homely personage, he was substantial and quite *in untrumque paratus*—seemed to inspire the assembly with new courage and animation, and clustering around him, as if for protection, they were profuse in their good wishes for the new year. Among them was a venerable gentleman, attired in official robes, to whom everyone showed marked deference. He was the district magistrate, Mr. Mo Kwang, a native of Canton, and a most worthy and intelligent man, who was on intimate terms with the wealthy rice merchant, whom he now approached and greeted with sincere cordiality, at the same time glancing significantly around at the company.

"My dear Mr. Hung, *Gong-he far choi! Gong-he far choi!* And may your riches never grow less," he said, bowing several times and adding in a low, tremulous voice: "It is, indeed, a selfish pleasure to meet you here on this auspicious day and this portentous occasion, when the chosen few honoured with His Excellency's recognition are gathered together to respectively render him homage and, by virtue of necessity, acquiesce to his dominion over them."

"Most worthy and honoured friend," replied Hung Fong, making several profound obeisances, "pray pardon my disgraceful oversight in not having seen you first, and, with all the respect

due to your superior age, position and attainments, tendered you my heartfelt good wishes for the new year, which——”

“Which dawns amidst impending clouds,” interposed the old man, sadly and meaningly, as they crossed to a quiet corner of the room and sat down together upon a settee.

“And even if the sun does not shine, and the day is dark,” continued Hung Fong, “still the night may be made beautiful by the radiance of the moon, whose pure light will be strengthened by the many lesser ones which surround it. With your good influence, which will be supported by the people of this city, much unhappiness and ill may be averted.”

“If I be the moon, dear friend, and you good citizens the stars,” responded the old man, with a sad smile, “I much fear that you will have to depend solely upon the stars for your light. My days in Lien are numbered, for I have heard that I am soon to be transferred to Amoy, one of the ports on the distant coast of Fuhkien.”

“This is, indeed, sad news!” said Hung Fong, relapsing into silence, and vigorously fanning himself to hide his feelings; for he was a kind-hearted man, and greatly liked and respected the magistrate, and knew full well what an irreparable loss the city would sustain by his removal.

“If you must leave us,” he at length said, “may I have the consolation of knowing that your transference will mean promotion for you?”

“No, no, my kind friend, there is no promotion for me,” he said with a pensive smile. “I am poor, therefore I must not expect to attain to a higher rank than that which I now hold and have

held for many long years; for I cannot afford to purchase it. Had I accumulated riches by taking the bribes which have been offered me repeatedly by unscrupulous malefactors, or taken advantage of the numerous other opportunities I have had of unlawfully enriching myself, I should now be in a position to buy place and power—for wealth is the skeleton-key which opens the doors of all high offices. But I am happy; for, as the proverb says, 'a calm mind makes a cool body.' "

"And it is to your lasting credit—especially when considering your high intellectual attainments," said Hung Fong, emphatically, "that you have patiently and cheerfully suffered poverty and comparative obscurity, barely existing upon your meagre salary, yet proudly refusing all offers of aid, rather than avail yourself, as others do, of the license which is freely extended to all officials, enabling them to obtain with complete irresponsibility, unlimited emoluments, and grow fabulously rich upon the hard-earned resources of the unfortunate people they govern. You, Mr. Mo, have been upright and impartial, and the people love and respect you; and you must allow me to avail myself of this opportunity of expressing our indebtedness to you, and our admiration of the manner in which you have always administered justice."

"Your words give me unspeakable satisfaction, though I hardly consider myself worthy of such praise," replied the magistrate, his venerable, scholarly face lighting up with animation as he continued—"In his analects, Confucius says: 'with coarse rice to eat, with water to drink, and with my bended arm for a pillow, I still have joy in these

things. Wealth and honour gained unrighteously are to me as floating clouds.' Therefore, Mr. Hung, why should not I—being so far below and so insignificant when compared with that 'Throneless King'—be grateful for my well-being, and contented with my lot?"

"Worthy words, Mr. Mo! As Mencius says: 'some parts of our being are noble and some ignoble; some great and some small. The great must not be injured for the small, nor the noble for the ignoble. He who nourishes his small parts is a small man, and he who nourishes his great parts is a great man.'"

"I have made a rule," resumed the old gentleman, "of working upon an ancient system which Cemcu* extols and recommends, but which the judges of this age no longer practise. For nowadays justice is a by-word: it is sold to the highest bidder; and the poor and innocent suffer for the misdoings of the rich and guilty. In olden times our judges took every precaution, when a case was brought before their tribunals, to examine the external appearance of the plaintiff, that they might by this means determine whether he was influenced by worthy motives, whether he considered his cause good, and whether he acted ingenuously. There were five rules observed in these inquiries. By the first, which was called *Cutim*, they considered the placing of his words and his manner of speech; by the second, named *Setim*, they examined his countenance and the motion of his lips; by the third, *Kitim*, they took cognisance of the manner in which he respiration when stating his

* A famous disciple of Confucius.

case; by the fourth, *Uttim*, they carefully noted his replies, whether they were given with hesitation or evasiveness; and by the fifth, or *Motim*, they closely observed the eyes, in order to discover whether there was any appearance of trouble or confusion therein.

"The most hidden thoughts were in this manner discovered," resumed the magistrate, seriously. "The arbitrators of old were inspired and blessed with a strong sense of responsibility, which is the true criterion of conscientiousness, and with a love of equity and concord; and they used their utmost endeavours to prevent law-suits by reconciling the parties concerned and teaching them to live in peace and unity. But the sun of those summer days has set, and in the long darkness of this winter we must live—live in the memories of the glorious past, and in the time-hallowed writings of the illustrious dead."

"Would that our judges followed your example," said Hung Fong with fervour, continuing reminiscently. "I was particularly struck with your wise judgment in a very perplexing case which occurred about a year ago, when two women claimed the same child. I remember you expressed a fear that, as the child could not possibly have been brought into the world by two mothers, it was probably a fox-elf which, for some diabolical purpose, perhaps to cause dissension among good, honest people like themselves, had assumed human form; and you suggested the expediency of having the disputed property taken to the back of the court and tested by some very sagacious dogs there. The true mother at once cast herself down and implored you to apply a more lenient test, or

let the other woman have the child, rather than expose it to such danger. And in this manner you discovered the real parent to whom you restored the child, and she went away rejoicing; while the guilty woman quietly listened to your stern rebuke and caution, and then left the court, looking penitent and abashed."

"Yes, I was very puzzled at first, but fortunately I remembered reading of a somewhat similar case which occurred as far back as the Sung dynasty," said the worthy old gentleman, proceeding in all good faith to gravely relate the following legend:

"At the time of which I am speaking, there lived in Canton a manufacturer of ornaments who had a very beautiful wife, to whom he was passionately devoted. She reciprocated his affection, and, being a thrifty couple, they led a happy, prosperous life. But one day a white dog, gifted with extraordinary supernatural powers, happened to pass the house and, seeing the woman standing at the door, immediately became so enamoured of her charms that it determined to transform itself into an exact resemblance of her husband and then abduct her. The change was soon effected, and guessing the time when the object of its unlawful passion would most likely be alone, the wily rascal proceeded to the house, but had only just arrived at the door when the true husband came up and, regarding this counterpart of himself with evident surprise, asked him his business there. Whereupon the dog put on a flippant air and said: 'My good man, do you not know that this is my house?' And while the roguish animal was speaking, the wife opened the door and, seeing what appeared to be two husbands, became very

confused, and, being unable to judge between them, insisted that they should accompany her to the magistrate's yamen.

"I must tell you that at the back of the yamen there was a caged tiger which was so tame that it would not harm human beings, though it was a very dainty beast, and preferred nothing better than a well-fed dog, which it would devour with evident relish.

"Now the magistrate was a shrewd and learned man, and when the two husbands appeared before him, he at once became suspicious that one of them was a dog in disguise; so, making a very polite little speech as to the regret he felt in having to put the gentlemen to so much inconvenience, he had them both taken to the back premises, and there placed in the tiger's cage.

"The crafty dog was naturally very reluctant to go in, and tried to back out by assuming a spirit of self-abnegation, saying that, being of a peaceful and studious disposition, he would resign his claim rather than create so much trouble. But the good magistrate would have none of it and, smiling blandly, answered that he would no more like to see justice defeated and him despoiled of so comely a spouse, than he would to see the tiger deprived of a savoury meal; and into the cage the two claimants were driven. In a moment the beast flew at the disguised dog and devoured it with avidity, but the true husband was left unharmed. Then the happy couple, after thanking the worthy magistrate and propitiating the gods, returned home, and for the remainder of their days enjoyed uninterrupted conjugal happiness. I used this singular case as a precedent; so it is not my

ingenuity you must praise, Mr. Hung Fong, but that of the wise magistrate who lived in the Sung dynasty, and whose sound and legitimate dealings are still held in esteem, though not practised, by the people of this degenerate age."

"Degenerate, indeed!" said Hung Fong; "but craving your pardon for reverting to the subject which concerns me most, may I ask, Mr. Mo, who is likely to be your successor?"

"I have not heard for certain, though I have every reason to believe that he will be a countryman of His Excellency's—a Manchu-Tartar."

"I have heard," continued Hung Fong, "that the northern judges, though shrewd and severe, are exceedingly polite."

The magistrate smiled.

"Their urbanity is proverbial," he said, continuing in a lower voice. "You will find that His Excellency Shum Ming is also a very affable and courteous man; but, as Confucius says,* 'a long experience is necessary to understand the heart of man.' I imagined, when I was young, that every man was sincere, and that he always practised what he advocated; in other words, that his mouth always agreed with his heart. But now that I see things with another eye, I am certain that I was mistaken. Now I hear what men say, but I never rely thereon: I examine whether their words are agreeable to their actions. I commend this policy to you, my friend, though I have every confidence in your perspicacity and discretion."

A *tingchai* now entered the apartment and announced that His Excellency would be pleased to

* The Chinese are much given to quoting proverbs and the sayings of their philosophers.

receive Mr. Mo Kwang; so with decorous cordiality the old gentleman took leave of the merchant, at the same time expressing a sincere hope that they would see one another before his departure from Lien.

His interview with the Taotai must have been of brief duration, for other names were called in quick succession; so that Hung Fong soon found himself alone—evidently reserved for the last reception, but not the least attention. At length he was summoned, and rising from his seat, followed the attendant into a spacious hall, the interior walls of which were quaintly frescoed, and at intervals hung with oblong scrolls containing texts and verses; while the furniture consisted of several ebony chairs and console tables, and a raised dais or platform, covered with red cloth and surmounted by two large chairs, in one of which sat the Taotai in full regalia and robes of state.

He was of medium height with sallow face, quick lynx-like eyes, upward-curving brows and long drooping moustaches which, together with his sharp, clearly defined features, completed one of those insipid, vulpine physiognomies peculiar to the Tartar race—a stereotyped cast of features which might be better and more succinctly described as closely resembling an inverted U surmounted by a Y, with a dot beneath each arm and near the stem of the uppermost letter, thus—



He was evidently an opium smoker and had suffered from the small-pox, for his face was lean and cadaverous, and was in the condition of a

parched pea ; but upon it there perpetually bloomed a dry, insinuating smile which was anything but prepossessing.

His head-gear consisted of a conical-shaped official hat culminating in a red knob or "button," with two double-eyed peacock feathers hanging down behind, and his outer garments were of light and dark blue brocaded silk, the upper one being ornamented on back and front with a large square in each of which was a richly embroidered golden pheasant. These adornments, and a girdle cased with gold and set with rubies, which he wore round his waist, were insignia of exalted rank.

He was smoking a silver hubble-bubble pipe which needed constant refilling,* and for that purpose a coolie half sat and half crouched at his feet, holding a smouldering paper spill, which he blew into a flame when required. Another servile-looking, though better dressed, individual, who acted as *aide-de-camp* and interpreter, stood beside the despot's chair, and with anxious solicitude and awe anticipated his every word and look ; while a second *tingchai* hovered in nervous expectation near the door, ready to fly when bidden by a glance or nod.

As Hung Fong was ushered into the apartment, His Excellency descended from his throne and advanced two paces to meet him, at the same time drawing up the interstices of his face into a most diabolical expression which, however, was evidently meant as a reassuring smile, but which made the

* Chinese pipes have such very small bowls that they only hold a pinch of tobacco, and in consequence want refilling and lighting every moment or two.—See "The Mystic Flowery Land," chap. v., pp. 31.

worthy merchant almost quake in his ample shoes and feel more than ever fearful of the future. In this case the services of the interpreter were dispensed with, as the visitor could speak the Mandarin dialect, having acquired it through long and frequent commercial intercourse with strangers.

After the compliments of the season had been formally interchanged with much bowing and scraping, and Hung Fong had depreciatingly certified to his "humble name" being what it was, the host courteously invited him to the seat of honour on his left-hand side.* Then he proceeded to deliberately assail him with divers inquisitive questions which, in polite European society, would have been considered outrageously impertinent, and as the hall-mark of ignorance and low breeding; whereas in the "Celestial Empire" they were quite in accordance with the punctilious rules of etiquette, and furthermore were evidences of good-fellowship and *bienséance*.

"Well, Mr. Hung," he commenced amiably, "you have the appearance of a man who is in the prime and strength of his life; and of one who

* There is, in my opinion, only one theory which satisfactorily accounts for the strange left-handedness of the Chinese, which is so often commented upon with wonder by western nations. In many Chinese cities there are temples dedicated to the sun and moon, the former being built on the eastern side of the city, as its deity rises in that quarter, and the latter occupying a western position, because when at its full the moon sets in the west. Now owing to the north-east monsoon blowing in the winter, and the south-east monsoon during the summer, the Chinese generally build their houses with an open southerly front, and a closed northerly back, in order that they can avail themselves of the southerly winds of summer and shut out the bleak northerly gales of winter. But, owing to the circumstances explained above, the eastern side of the house is considered the highest, and the master of the establishment is therefore often called "East of the Household" or *Tang-kae*; and, in the reception-room, the most honourable place is the east, which naturally lies to the left of the master's chair.

enjoys its bounteous gifts. What is your age?"

"Your Excellency flatters me," replied Hung Fong. "My age is sixty, though I may look younger and stronger than I really am, in spite of the troubles and vicissitudes I have experienced of late years."

"If I have flattered you, Mr. Hung, I can truthfully say that you have not the appearance of a man of many troubles. I presume you are married?"

"Your Excellency is right," said the merchant, with a resigned look. "But marriage is an expensive luxury; and the cares and obligations it entails almost counterbalance its advantages."

"Your shoulders are broad, Mr. Hung. And pardon me for saying that I should imagine they are more than broad enough to bear all the trials and exigencies that assail a married man in your position." Here he fabricated an appalling smile, adding, "and no doubt your purse is equal to the strain. What is your income?"

Shun Ming had a nasty way of sailing serenely up to a subject and then suddenly pouncing upon it, like a spider on a fly, thus creating embarrassment by which he invariably profited. Hung Fong had expected the question, but its abruptness somewhat disconcerted him and he hesitated; not from any feeling of inability or reluctance to prevaricate—for, to give him his due, a true Son of Han is rarely *déconçu* in that respect,—but from fear lest his cunning interrogator should already be informed as to the actual state of his exchequer. He had no desire to arouse his wrath any more than his avarice, nor yet to unduly encourage a friendship which might prove co-ordinately disastrous. However, he was equal to the occasion, and in far

less time than it has taken to chronicle it, politely placed his opponent *hors de combat* by suddenly discovering an imaginary mosquito upon the back of his neck.

Now in China if a guest or host rises ever so little from his chair, the other immediately follows suit; so, to enable himself to exterminate the supposed mosquito, Hung Fong requested His Excellency not to move for a moment,* and rising from his seat despatched it with one fell blow,† which was delivered with so much vigour that it made the old gentleman see an abundance of small meteors, and then anxiously place his hand on the spot where the mosquito had been slain, to feel whether his head was still on his shoulders or his neck dislocated. Finding himself whole, he complacently thanked Mr. Hung Fong and expressed a hope that he had not hurt his hand.

"This old yamen is a veritable den of those sanguinary pests," he continued drily. "Ever since my arrival here they have nightly gorged themselves upon my attenuated frame, keeping me awake with their fierce and persistent onslaughts, and when appeased perching themselves upon my nose, and playing their confederates on to the attack with their tuneful but monotonous hum. I have read that in the Tang dynasty there lived a dutiful son who, finding that his mother was unable

* It is very amusing to see how a company of Chinese gentlemen will keep bobbing up and down in their chairs, as if one and all were afflicted with the nervous fidgets. Should one rise, they all do likewise, and remain standing until he re-seats himself.

† In China it is an act of courtesy to rid your companion of a mosquito; and these pests are always killed by bringing the flat palm of the hand sharply down upon them while their proboscis is embedded in the flesh. This is the only way of exterminating them, as they are very quick and watchful.

to enjoy nocturnal rest through the ferocity of a band of mosquitoes which infested her sleeping apartment and unmercifully tormented her, repaired every night to her couch before she retired, and allowed the mosquitoes to educe his blood until satiated, thus securing her immunity from further annoyance. The gods have blessed me with a son, Mr. Hung, but—although I should raise no objection—he has never evinced any such filial piety as this; but nowadays sons do not seem to be quite as dutiful and exemplary as they used to be. Have you any children, Mr. Hung?"

"The gods have likewise blessed me with a son," replied the merchant, not mentioning his daughter; for in China it is not customary to speak of the gentler sex.

A servant now brought in two cups of tea on a tray, and His Excellency showed his marked respect for his guest by rising and taking a cup in both hands and presenting it to him. In accordance with the strict forms of etiquette, and in acknowledgment of the compliment, Hung Fong stood up and received it from him with his two hands.

"Yes, this old yamen is in a very dilapidated condition," resumed my host, as they re-seated themselves. "It has been allowed to crumble away until almost uninhabitable. The exterior and these front rooms are not so bad, but the back ones are disgracefully ruinous. When the new year is over, I intend making a round of inspection, as I hear that portions of the city wall require seeing to, also the bridge outside the western gate. I suppose, Mr. Hung, your family has resided here for some time?"

"Yes, your Excellency, for many centuries," Hung Fong answered with some pride.

"Then, of course, you take a personal interest in the home of your honourable forefathers," said Shun Ming, unexpectedly adding: "So no doubt you would like to accompany me on my proposed survey; for, as the proverb says, 'one man's plan is short, two men's plan is long.'"

The merchant felt far from flattered at this invitation. It savoured strongly of an expedition organised for the purpose of plundering those who participated in it. He took a Chinaman's common sense view of the matter. This pleasant old gentleman meant to tap his coffers without delay, and in the most elegant and approved Mandarin manner. No doubt there were plenty of cracks and crannies in the ancient city wall and elsewhere, which His Excellency would propose to fill up. Then he would despatch a party of his rapsallion soldiers to earn their rice and his good graces by stopping and plastering the holes with mud and *chenam*, and would send in a thumping bill to Mr. Hung Fong. In other words, he wanted to rob him of a few thousand *taels* in a friendly official manner, making a favour of the annexation. All this passed through the civilian's mind in a flash, for he was a man of *savoir faire*, and he assumed a look of genuine pleasure and gratitude as he replied:

"I am deeply conscious of the distinction conferred upon me by your Excellency, and I sincerely trust that no unforeseen event will deprive me of the eagerly anticipated honour and gratification of forming one of so distinguished a party, and so commendable a mission."

This was satisfactory, and the nice old Taotai smiled magnanimously. But in the meantime he wanted to obtain an estimate of his intended victim's wealth, so that during the holidays he might have something pleasing to contemplate and dwell upon; for nothing gladdens and warms the heart of a *bona-fide* Manchu-Tartar mandarin of the old school more than the prospect of unlimited "squeezing."

"I often envy you civilians, Mr. Hung," he said, taking his pipe from its bearer and puffing out a volume of smoke. "We officials have all the responsibility of governing and maintaining order, are constantly at work inditing despatches, issuing proclamations, and attending to important affairs of State, are liable to be fined heavily and degraded for the slightest error, and may expect to be transferred at a moment's notice to the uttermost parts of the empire. Whereas you can engage in any business which you consider remunerative; you are, practically speaking, your own masters, and have only your individual interests and families to consider—though, of course, a conscientious and affluent man like yourself always has the welfare of his native place at heart,—and you are at liberty to live in peace and happiness, in the bosom of your family, wherever you please."

Here he paused a moment to offer the pipe to his guest, and the inevitable exchange of civilities ensued.

"Yes, there is no doubt that trade is highly lucrative; it flourishes like the bamboo," he at length resumed. "As the proverb says: 'A single strand of silk will not make a thread, nor a solitary tree a grove'; and it requires many days

and many *taels* to build up a fortune. How long has it taken you, Mr. Hung, to build yours?"

"I have been thirty-three years toiling and hoping, your Excellency, but I am ashamed and sorry to say that my realisations are infinitesimally small in proportion to the work done and time expended."

Having received his pipe back, Shun Ming enveloped himself in a dense cloud of smoke. He was now approaching the critical point, where his previous discourse had been so rudely interrupted. But this time he was more cautious in approaching and framing the all-important question; perhaps being fearful lest it should attach another mosquito to his person.

"I have likewise toiled and hoped for many years, and am still poor," he said, with an insidious smile; "therefore, taking your case into consideration, and the time you have toiled, I should, out of mere curiosity, like to hear from a man of your business capacity what you consider a small competency, and to thus compare the fruits of our respective labours."

Hung Fong had been manœuvred into a nasty corner, and how to dodge out of it without betraying himself or appearing rude somewhat taxed his diplomacy. Nevertheless he found an exit, being no novice in the art of "*Celestial*" *usage du monde*.

"That which would be a meal for a cat would not be a mouthful for a tiger," he replied with a depreciative smile, toying with his teacup. "And to compare your Excellency's fortune with mine, which is so insignificant and unworthy of mention, would be an undue liberty and an insult of which I would not be guilty."

The fact of his having touched his cup when speaking placed his interrogator *extra muros*; for in the most delicate and courteous manner it concluded the interview by inviting him to drink tea. To have continued the conversation after that would have been a flagrant breach of etiquette.

Rising simultaneously they went through the usual ceremonies, and having reiterated many good wishes, Hung Fong gracefully bowed himself out of the reception-hall, heaving a sigh of relief that the visit was over. As he passed down the last flight of steps into the road, he glanced back.

"'The mouth of a Buddha and the heart of a snake,'" he said to himself, repeating an old Chinese proverb, as grim forebodings of approaching trouble entered his susceptible mind.

Feeling convinced that some bad, mercenary spirit was haunting him, he determined to rid himself of its evil influence and company by burning a liberal offering of silver paper, fashioned to represent sycee "shoes," which would appease its avarice; and with the intention of thus ransoming himself, he proceeded homeward.



CHAPTER III

POLITICS

After leaving his father, Cheng sauntered along the main street for some distance, pausing frequently to exchange greetings and converse with some friend or acquaintance, when he and they would bow and scrape and go through the conventional formalities with all the gravity and decorum of their elders. At length coming to a somewhat squalid neighbourhood, he turned into a narrow alley-way and knocked at the door of a one-storied tenement, into which he was admitted by a young boy, who informed him that Mr. Wong A-Chih was at home. Being a frequent visitor at the house, he did not wait to be conducted into the presence of his tutor, but at once ascended a rickety flight of stairs and knocked at the door of a front room. A weak but cheery voice bade him enter, and he did so.

The occupant was a man long past the prime of life, with bended form and lengthy white beard, which imparted to him a patriarchal aspect. His scanty hair was carefully plaited into a queue interlaced with narrow black silk braid, which made up for the deficiency in hair and ended in

two slender tassels. His lofty brow was clean shaven but deeply furrowed, and his face, though wrinkled and thin, was healthy and pleasant to behold ; for in the placid depths of his bright grey eyes there lingered a light of other days, and an intelligent vivacity which age had softened and refined into sweet wistfulness. There was also an indescribable charm about his manner—a quiet, unassuming dignity and gentle contentment and sincerity with which his every word and movement seemed to naturally conform ; and he was always cheerful and interesting. His clothes were of a coarse, dark-blue material, and, though old, were spotlessly clean, and seemed all in keeping with the wearer and his humble abode, which was furnished in the plainest style.

The small sitting-room, in which we are introduced to this venerable scholar, had a round ebony table in the centre, several chairs of like material and workmanship, and the white-washed walls boasted of a few paper scrolls bearing elegantly written hieroglyphics giving quotations from the best poets and philosophers, some being ornamented with delicate fronds and flowers executed in that exclusively oriental and artistic manner with half a dozen effective strokes, relieved perhaps by a single bird or fly. For it is truly wonderful what striking effects a Chinese or Japanese artist can produce with a few deft touches of his sharp pencil-shaped brush, which also serves as a pen.

Immediately on entering the room Cheng reverentially *kowtowed*, prostrating himself before the old man, who at once assisted him to rise, at the same time blessing him, and exhorting him to

piety and learning. Having inquired into one another's health and circumstances, they seated themselves near the window, upon the inside of which were several glazed bowls containing narcissus flowers, which—as the visitor quickly noticed—were in full bloom.

"I see your *sui-sin* buds have blossomed," he said, leaning towards them, "and I wish you all the good luck their timely development forbodes."

"Thank you, dear Ah-tin,* for your kind wishes; but I do not desire more prosperity than that which I now enjoy. As Mencius says: 'He who would be rich will not be benevolent, and he who would be benevolent will not be rich.' I have food and raiment sufficient for my humble requirements, and the gods have blessed me with good health; so I have much to be grateful for."

"You remind me, dear master, of Yanhwei, the beloved disciple of Confucius, who says of him—'with one bamboo bowl of rice, a single gourd of drink, and living in a mean and narrow lane, while others would not have endured the distress, he did not allow his happiness to be affected by it.' Indeed, sir, I am fortunate in having so excellent a preceptor as you; and I sincerely hope that I shall always prove myself worthy of your esteemed friendship and tuition."

"Go on in the way you are now going, dear Ah-tin, practising virtue for virtue's sake, and observing a happy mediocrity in all things,

* In China a schoolmaster or tutor always gives his pupil a name which he is entitled to use. Moreover, although a Chinaman's surname (the first syllable) never changes, he usually has four legal Christian names—that given by his parents, the one bestowed by his schoolmaster, the name he assumes when in society, and that which he takes when married.

and no harm will come of you. But tell me, how is your good father?"

"He is well, sir, and would have accompanied me hither to see you, but was obliged to defer that pleasure, since His Excellency Shun Ming had made it incumbent upon him to call and pay his respects to him; and when I left him he was on his way to the yamen."

"Ah, ah!" Mr. Wong ejaculated, mechanically opening and closing his fan, but not venturing to make any further comment."

"I am sorry that he has gone there, sir," Cheng resumed, also resorting to his fan. "For, with all due deference to my father's superior age and wisdom, I fail to see what good can possibly come of the visit."

"His policy is good, Ah-tin; never turn your back upon a tiger," said the old man in a confidential tone, continuing with a smile. "One day a monkey was seized by a hungry tiger who was about to make a short meal of him, when a plan of escape suggested itself to the captive. 'I am afraid, sir,' he said, 'that my lean little body would only provide a very unsavoury snack for you; but, if you will allow me, I shall have much pleasure in conducting you to a neighbouring hill where you will find a more palatable and substantial repast awaiting you.' This suggestion found favour with the tiger, who forthwith followed the monkey until coming to the brow of a hill, where the latter revealed to him a fine young stag lying in a thicket. 'There is a hearty meal for you, sir!' said the monkey; but as they approached the stag it rose to its feet and, finding escape was impossible, determined to put a bold face on the matter.

Looking very dignified, he addressed the monkey—‘What is the meaning of this, sirrah? You promised faithfully that you would bring me ten tiger skins, and now you only bring me one—and a poor one it looks, too. Don’t forget, you still owe me nine.’ On hearing these portentous words, the tiger became much alarmed, and at once made off, muttering to himself that he never thought a monkey could be so treacherous.”

“You convince me, sir, that my father has acted discreetly,” said Cheng, smiling. “But I am glad that he allowed me the option of coming to see you, in preference to accompanying him thither. Socially, His Excellency is a great man. Morally, sir, you are a greater one; and I wish to consult you with regard to some plans and resolutions I have made for the ensuing year.”

“I am glad you have come to see me and confer with me,” said the old man kindly; “for the commencement of a year is an eventful epoch in the lives of most people, particularly those who have not yet reached the sober years of maturity. It is the all-important time when you begin life again, as it were, with all its hopes and resolves, and when many of the fruitful seeds which spring up and gradually entwine themselves about your destinies—either supporting or dragging them downward—are planted in the loose earth of your minds, where their roots remain for ever.”

“Labour, dear Ah-tin,” he resumed earnestly, “and cultivate the garden of your mind—not only carefully training and vigilantly watching the growth of the plants therein, but diligently uprooting and destroying any rank and noxious weeds which you may discover there. This, however, is

far easier resolved upon than accomplished, and most of us are too indolent or callous to do more than make some feeble efforts in order to still that whispering voice within. And these selfish efforts are so few and far between, and so seldom amount to more than the usual good resolutions, that they are likely to prove a curse rather than a blessing, and our garden becomes such a wilderness of weeds and brambles that we grow reckless from despair."

"Then, sir, am I to believe that you do not altogether approve of resolutions?"

"Not exactly, Ah-tin; under certain conditions I approve of them. Good resolutions should tend to strengthen us morally, providing they are frequently repeated and, by the aid of the gods, systematically carried out. But if we confine ourselves to the New Year for their reiteration and recollection, we are apt during the interval to lose that sense of responsibility which is so essential to the completion of virtue. Moreover, it is far better and infinitely more manly not to make any resolutions, than to make and then break them; for by so doing we lose our self-respect, which should, at all times, be our strongest safeguard and shield. If, on the other hand, we are able by unrelaxing effort, and by observing the golden mean in all things, to keep our resolutions, then they are beneficent and prove a source of great comfort and satisfaction, inasmuch as we can look back with pardonable pride to the time when they were registered in our hearts, and feel that—after many manful struggles—we have done that which we determined to do; and we are thus endowed and rewarded with new strength and confidence.

and increased self-respect. As the Great Master says: 'After we clearly know the end to which we would attain, it is necessary for us to determine and to continually strive towards that end by walking in the ways which lead thereto by daily confirming in our mind the determination, and by establishing it so thoroughly that nothing may in the least displace it.

"'Having fixed in your mind this great resolution,' he continues. 'abandon yourself to meditation. Reason upon all things within yourself and endeavour to have some clear ideas thereof; carefully considering whatever presenteth itself to you and passing, without prejudice, sound judgment thereon, examining and weighing everything with care. After examination and reasoning of this kind, you may easily arrive at the end where you ought to resolutely stand—namely, at a perfect conformity of all your actions with what reason suggests.' Bear this in mind, dear Ah-tin."

"Indeed I will, sir," replied the attentive young scholar, his handsome face lighting up with enthusiasm as he resumed. "After due deliberation, and with your consent, I have resolved to go up for my second examination this year; so I shall leave for Canton* some time during the fourth or fifth moon, the signs and elements proving favourable."

"It is a long journey, Ah-tin; and you must be careful to invoke the aid of the gods in your commendable enterprise, and to consult a good astrologer. I should also advise you to carry with you a copy of the 'Hwang-le-tang-sheu,' from which

* Triennial examinations for the second degree, called "Chu-jin," or Promoted Man, are held in the provincial capitals.



you will derive much valuable instruction regarding the most propitious and unpropitious days ; for, as you know, every hour and day is ruled by its proper planet."

"If I am again successful, and take my second degree, I should like to make a pilgrimage to the sacred shrine of Confucius,† in order to render him homage and thanks, and propitiate his *shen* ;‡ for he has placed all mankind under a deep obligation to him, and the more I read his wonderful works the more conscious of this I become."

"A most praiseworthy desire and a most pious feeling, dear Ah-tin!" said the master. "But in order to increase your chances of success in the examination, you must work diligently, as a much higher standard of excellency is required for the Chu-jin. The Imperial Commissioner and his officers are very particular, and the slightest discrepancy in your prose or verse essays would be sufficient to disqualify you. Therefore, in the meantime, I propose putting you through a course of reading which will embrace the chief writings of Li Tai-po and Teu Fu, particularly those of the former—whose style and cadence are almost unequalled among our lyric poets. His thoughts sparkle and rush like a mountain stream : here suddenly leaping over a ponderous rock and dashing ahead through a gloomy gorge, and there gently meandering through a lovely valley ; sometimes lost among the grass, and at others winding across

† To avoid confusion I have given the Jesuit Latinised name of Kong Fu-tsze, which is Confucius. The same with Mencius. Confucius was a contemporary of Pythagoras.

‡ The Chinese always use the word *shen* when speaking respectfully of the spirits of the departed. Those which are regarded with superstitious fear are called *kwei*, or demons.

a flat dreary waste, but always refreshing, harmonious and bright, and full of Nature's effervescence. He follows no rule, and lightly vaults over obstacles which would impede or quite disconcert most poets, and has in him that reckless daring which is born of a happy consciousness of being universally loved."

"I always thought, sir, that among the poets of the Tang dynasty, Teu Fu ranked on an equality with Li Tai-po."

"Teu Fu was undoubtedly a great genius," replied the old man; "and his celebrated poem, 'The Deserted Wife,' is equal to many of Li Tai-po's effusions. But place 'The White River Rapids' beside it, and I think you will agree with the majority of people—that he takes a minor place."

"It is strange, sir," said Ah-tin, "but the lives of our greatest poets seem to preserve an almost unbroken record of penury, vicissitude, and tribulation; take, for instance, Teu Fu, Su Tung-po, and Yueh Yuen,* the author of that beautiful poem, 'The Dispersion of Sorrow.'"

"True, sadly true, dear Ah-tin; for sorrow is the mother of song and seclusion its birthright. The nightingale sings sweetest when alone and far afield in the sad and solemn hours of twilight, when the darkness of night is nigh; and, like it, the true poet seeks the by-paths of life, and alone in the wilderness remembers the golden days and cherished friends which have gone to return no

* Teu Fu flourished in the eighth century and died of hunger A.D. 768, while taking refuge in a temple; Su Tung-po lived in the Sung dynasty, and passed his life in exile (see Su Tung-po's life and letters in "The Mystic Flowery Land"), and Yueh Yuen lived 430 B.C., and committed suicide by drowning himself.

more, and out of his sorrow comes his song. His soul is chastened and lifted heavenward by the shadows of earthly life; and in his eyes there is a far-away look, which is the reflection of eternity, and a pure ethereal light, which is the light of immortality. The same may be said of our great philosophers, whose sensitive natures and craving after the immaculate, made them keenly alive to the shallowness and insincerity of human life; and their noble and exemplary lives were spent in deploring the moral laxity of mankind, and in trying to resuscitate the perfect nature which is bestowed by heaven upon all men, but which is generally allowed to lie dormant. Mencius says: 'Men lose their chickens and dogs, and have understanding to seek after them; but they lose the child heart and have no understanding to seek after it. The path of education is none other than to seek after the lost heart.' "

"Speaking of the philosophers, sir," said Cheng, fumbling in his pocket and producing a small book with a paper cover,† "you expressed a wish, some time ago, to possess a copy of Lao-tsze's‡ 'Yaou Tich Keng,' which I have managed to procure for you from some traders who passed through Lien some days ago on their way from Canton to Pao-king. Will you receive it as a slight token of gratitude for your kindness to me?"

Rising to his feet, Mr. Wong received the book with both hands and appeared much gratified with the gift.

† Chinese books do not as a rule boast of elaborate bindings like ours; their contents, not condition, being their only recommendation in a Chinaman's eyes. Moreover they end where ours begin, and are read from right to left.

‡ The founder of Taouism; contemporary with Confucius.

"My dear Ah-tin," he said, fondly regarding the book, "you have given me that which is more precious in my eyes than jadestone or gold. This little volume with its 500 immortal pages is all that the 'Venerable Sage'* left behind, with the 'keeper-of-the-pass,' before he dauntlessly wandered away over the wilderness, never to return again, and the sun sank down in calm magnificence; yet it forms the keystone of an azure bridge which will last until this world is no more, and will carry millions of souls safely across the dark stygian river to the blessed land where our forefathers dwell. Each of these bright, enigmatic sentences has indelibly engraven itself upon the memory of our nation; and although our wisest and best men have spent their lives in trying to discover the true colour of those scintillating gems, and have left the problem unsolved to posterity, still they continue to defy human comprehension, for in them lie the profound secrets of immortality—of the soul's destiny.

"This precious book points the way to a better state," continued the old man, stooping down to peruse a page; for although he usually wore spectacles, it would have been grossly impolite to use them in company. "It is the language of one who has held communion with 'an infinite being which existed before heaven and earth. How tranquil it is, and how free! It lives alone and changes not. . . . You look at it but

* A halo of mystery surrounds the fate of Lao-tsze, who held some Government appointment in the state of Chau; but troubles arising there he set out on a journey, of which there is no record, and was never heard of again. His proper name was *Lao-keun*, but the Chinese named him *Lao-tsze*, or "Venerable Infant," because he was born with white hair.

cannot discern it. You listen to it, but cannot hear it. You endeavour to feel it, but you cannot reach it. You use it, but cannot exhaust it. It is not expressible in words. It is motionless and void, standing alone and changing not, penetrating everywhere but beyond danger. It is ever inactive, yet leaves nothing undone. Phenomena appear from it, change through it, and in it disappear. Though formless it generates form; and, though nameless, it is the creator of heaven and earth; and with a name it is the mother of all things. It is the ethical nature of the good man, and also his quickening power.' "

Here the old man closed the book and, laying his hands caressingly upon it, went on talking.

"That execrable tyrant Shi Hwang-ti who, as you know, massacred 500 scholars and burned all the classical works he could find—in order to appear to future generations as the first Emperor of China †—even spared this book which has inspired some of the finest works we have. At the head of them may be placed our "Manual of Rewards and Punishments," which founds a moral

† The Chinese have not yet discovered that Shi Hwang-ti's true motive for burning the books of Confucius, Mencius, and others, and slaughtering the literati—crimes which could never be forgiven or forgotten by a literary nation like China—was to entirely efface and annihilate all memory of the feudal system which had risen during the Chau dynasty, that lasted over 800 years, when the empire was divided into petty states governed by vassal princes who contended with one another for supremacy, thus weakening the central Government. Shi Hwang-ti—the founder and only emperor of the Tsin dynasty—who had been engaged for many years in warfare with the Northern Tartars, subdued the rebellious States, and, having effectually exterminated the feudal system, divided the empire into thirty-six provinces. He has been very aptly termed the "Napoleon of China," for he was brave, ambitious and active, and was endowed with remarkable ability; and he not only consolidated the empire, but also built the famous Great Wall of China, and many canals, roads and palaces which have lasted through 2,000 years, and are still in use.

code for our everyday life upon the all-wise precepts of the Venerable Sage."

"Do you consider, sir, that China was better governed in the olden times than it is now?" asked Cheng.

"Indeed I do think so, Ah-tin. It was not only better governed but more respected by other nations. There has been a gradual but sure decline since the great Sung dynasties." (A.D. 960—1278).

Here the old man lowered his voice and, producing a folded sheet of thin paper from his pocket, resumed: "We are now under the yoke of pitiless tyrants who educe the substance of the country without benefiting it. Yesterday I received a letter from a nephew of mine who is living at Tchinho, in the province of Fuhkien. Though worded with necessary caution, it sheds just sufficient light upon political affairs to be instructive and interesting; so I will read it:—

WONG HOI'S HOUSE, TCHINHO, FUHKIEN.
7th Moon, 20th Year of Kuang-su.

MOST BELOVED AND VENERATED UNCLE,—

A long period has elapsed since I last had the pleasure and honour of hearing from you, and I sincerely hope that you still enjoy good health. As this missive has to go a long and roundabout journey, I suppose by the time it reaches you the New Year festivities will have begun in earnest; so let me now wish you prosperity, longevity, and all the other blessings which should crown a virtuous and useful life like yours. But I know full well, most worthy uncle, that you do not desire riches and that you find perpetual enjoyment in living a pious life. As Confucius says: "The wise man has an infinitude of pleasures: for virtue has its charms in the midst of the severities which attend it." I also hope that all things continue serene and satisfactory in your neighbourhood. I regret to relate that trade has been much crippled in Fuhkien of late by the heavy

taxes which the mandarins have thought proper to levy upon all imports and exports, besides the usual likin duties. However, we are informed that these taxes are imposed for excellent purposes—namely, for the replenishment of certain shrines and edifices which have fallen into a ruinous condition. I hear, through official sources, that our Government is at war with a rebellious tributary state called Tong-yan,* and that our Imperial troops have gained a succession of glorious victories over the enemy, both by land and sea. I have heard rumours of a rebellion in the south among the Hakkas; but I have no means of ascertaining the authenticity of the news, though I should not be surprised were it true. . . .

"You see, Ah-tin," continued Mr. Wong, folding and replacing the letter, "the country is in a disturbed state. The people are beginning to awake from their lethargy to a sense of the injustice and persecution which they have so long and meekly tolerated. The signs are not wanting to a keen observer that this dynasty is tottering to a timely fall; for corruption and dissatisfaction are everywhere rampant, and the people are only waiting and praying for a determined leader like the great Tieng Wang or Chung Wang, of the memorable but ill-starred Taiping rebellion."

"But I thought, sir, that the Taiping rebels adopted a barbarous religion of the West—the Christian religion as it is called."

* Tong-yan is the Chinese name for Japan. The above letter shows the imperfect knowledge of the Chinese respecting the affairs of their country. There are no newspapers or means of communication in China except by cart, barrow, caravan or boat; and, for their own evil designs, the officials use every means in their power to mislead the people and keep them in a state of blind ignorance. The study of geography is strictly prohibited under the most severe penalties, and it is generally reported and credited throughout the empire that all other countries are merely dependencies of China—hence the disdain with which foreigners are treated. Moreover, the officials strenuously oppose and discourage any communication with strangers—especially with missionaries, who are regarded as the forerunners of commercial enterprise, and the most atrocious stories are circulated concerning them.

"My dear Ah-tin, when you have lived and studied as long as I have, you will have learned that all religions tend to elevate mankind morally, and, furthermore, that they are derived from one and the same source, being merely the germs or seeds from one plant. On being dispersed, some entered the earth and flourished in proximity to their parent tree; while others got separated from the family and were carried to the uttermost parts of the earth and, taking root there, in time generated and diffused their own seeds which were likewise scattered abroad and grew according to the nature and fruitfulness of the soil in which they were sown. But, as I said before, all originally emanated from the same source, and during the lapse of ages have undergone many transitions—some retaining much of their primeval character, and others growing out of all recognition and assuming new shapes and characteristics pleasing to the tastes and ideas of their cultivators. Regarding the Taipings, however, it was a terrible misfortune for China that they were not victorious, and——"

"Pardon my interruption, sir," said Cheng, "but I thought that at one time nearly the whole of China was under their sway?"

"So it was," replied the old man with considerable ardour; "but at the last moment the demoralised imps, under various promises and pretexts, obtained the aid of the warlike people of the West. Although the latter had pledged themselves to observe strict neutrality, it did not prevent them from supplying arms and ammunition to the Manchus, lending them trained military officers and men for service under the dragon flag,

and allowing their men-of-war to bombard Nankin. Their great warships were purposely placed in such a position that when the Taipings opened fire from the forts on the Imperialist vessels, they could not help hitting with a few shots the foreign ones, which made this an excuse for joining in the fray."

"But why, sir, were the English,* as I have heard them called, so eager to interfere, especially when the Taipings had adopted their religion, which—as I have heard you say—they had long been endeavouring to introduce into China?"

"That's where the noteworthy part of the transaction comes in!" replied Mr. Wong, taking up a white-metal hubble-bubble pipe and filling it with tobacco. "I must tell you, Ah-tin, that then, as well as now, that cursed opium trade was almost wholly monopolised by those great foreigners; not only that, but a large indemnity was then owing them through the war at Canton. As no doubt you have heard, the Taipings were strict anti-opiumists: indeed, that pernicious drug was prohibited in their dominions under a penalty of death. So had the Taipings overthrown the Manchu-Tartar dynasty and re-established the Mings—which they nearly accomplished and would have done had it not been for foreign intervention,—the foreigners would have lost both the opium trade and the indemnity, though really they would have gained in other respects. For the country would have enjoyed peace, good government and prosperity; and commercial relations with other countries would have been, and actually were,

* The Chinese name for English is Ying Yuen; but for obvious reasons I have not given their pronunciation.—AUTHOR.

encouraged throughout the empire. So you see, dear friend, it was not altogether a pure spirit of friendliness which prompted this action on the part of the foreigners, nor yet any pious and charitable one; for the so-called rebels, besides embracing the Christian religion, did all in their power to encourage trade and do away with the corrupt practices and extortion of the pitiless despots, under whose lash we shall writhe and groan until the eyes of the western world are opened, and some brave and dauntless spirit rises again from among us and calls the people to arms. Nor will he call in vain!

"I know, dear Ah-tin, that what I say goes no further, and I like to have someone in whom I can safely confide my hopes and opinions; and a higher power than that of the weak and pompous Son of Heaven* will decide whether my conversation is justifiable treason—if treason it can be called."

"I reciprocate your feelings and ideas, sir, and love to hear you talk," said Cheng, with fervour and respect displayed in voice and look. "But when, sir, do you think it is likely that the longed-for deliverance will come?"

"It may not be in my lifetime, Ah-tin, but perhaps you may live to see that glorious day, and to acquit yourself as becomes a true Son of Han. But I shall not have been the only one who has watched and patiently waited and prayed through many years; for ever since the descendants of the Kins established themselves at Peking† China has been the scene of countless

* The grandiloquent title assumed by the Emperor of China.

† In the year 1644.

anti-dynastic intrigues, all of which have been suppressed with the awful and wholesale slaughter of innocent men, women and children.

"The most noteworthy of these insurrections was, of course, that of the Taipings, when the powerful secret societies, with which this country is honey-combed, amalgamated under the leadership of the inspired Hung Sui-tschuen—afterwards known as the Tieng Wang (Heavenly Prince), and his noble and intrepid cousin and compatriot the Chung Wang (Faithful Prince) for the purpose, as I said before, of re-establishing the Mings on the throne and restoring this benighted land to its pristine glory and prosperity.

"I must tell you that the genealogy of Hung Sui-tschuen's family is one of the most ancient and illustrious in China. During ten centuries, until the era of the present dynasty, they trace members of their house occupying the most exalted positions in the empire. So far back as the Sung dynasty (A.D. 1000) many of the Hungs were prominent literati; and from that time until the Manchu invasion numbers of them have been members of the Han-lin College.*

Previous to the incursion of the present rulers, Hung Sui-tschuen's kindred formed a very powerful clan; but their staunch support of the final struggles for the Ming dynasty, and the terrible persecutions they and their families suffered at the hands of the invader considerably lessened their number. Upon the outbreak of the Taiping revolution the Hung clan was estimated at upwards of twenty thousand persons. Nearly all of

* To be a member of the Han-lin College is considered the highest honour in China.

them were massacred by the Imperialists simply because of their connection with a rebel. Six hundred of Hung Sui-tschuen's relatives, who peopled the Hwa district, near the city of Canton, with his father as headman, were mercilessly slaughtered by the Manchus, and their very dwellings razed to the ground and destroyed.

"As you know, dear Ah-tin, the Kwang-tung and Kwang-si provinces have always energetically resisted the Manchu-Tartar administration, for the simple reason that—soon after the subjugation of the Chinese by the present rulers—many of the families loyal to the dethroned Mings sought refuge in these two most southerly provinces. In consequence they have become the cradle of the secret societies, among the most powerful of which is the Sam Hop Woui (Triad Society), and then the Kolao Hwei, which has its head-quarters in Hunan. The latter society has its regular travelling emissaries, who always assume the character of doctors, and who enrol members, disseminate news, and give notice of projected risings, and generally aid a cause which the bigoted people of the West should thoroughly inquire into before condemning and helping to suppress.

"In the north of China the Tsung-li anti-opium society is largely recruited from the army, where general dissatisfaction prevails. The poor wretches only receive from three to four Haikwan (tael)† per month, out of which they have to board themselves. But by the time this miserable pittance has filtered down through the light fingers of the officials to the poor "braves," there is

† Between ten and twelve shillings.

rarely more than half left, if so much; and they are generally kept months in arrear of wages, receiving in the meantime barely sufficient to keep body and soul together. For that reason I am much surprised to hear from my nephew that our troops have met with a succession of glorious victories. I should not be at all surprised if he had written on the strength of one of those highly-coloured reports which the mandarins purposely circulate in order to keep the people in contented ignorance of the true state of affairs and the rottenness of our institutions. Dust is thrown in the eyes of the whole population to prevent them from seeing beyond the narrow limits of the boundaries put up by the officials, who are thus enabled to retain their sovereign power and influence over them; while the ignorant and over-credulous masses are—to speak figuratively—made to see through the dim and trumpery spectacles which are specially manufactured for their use.”

“I am aware, sir, from what you have frequently said, that in your early days you travelled widely,” said Cheng, somewhat diffidently; “but will you pardon my presumption in asking you how it is that you have acquired so much information respecting the Taipings, and the crafty machinations of the present-day officials?”

“Your question evinces your interest, dear Ah-tin, so I will be candid with you; for although it is a dangerous secret which I am about to reveal, and one which I have hitherto, for cogent reasons, closely guarded, I have unbounded confidence in you. My dear friend, as a young and patriotic man, like yourself, I fought under the Taiping standard of freedom, and worked my way up to a

command in the Chung Wang's Guard, following the fortunes of that youthful but heroic prince from the commencement to the bitter end. I witnessed the evacuation of Wu-see, and the terrible slaughter when Soochow was stormed and taken by the Anglo-Manchu forces; and was present at the fatal fall of Nankin, when 30,000 men, women, and children were ruthlessly massacred by the Imperialists, who afterwards spread the report that the Chung Wang had been slain. This was entirely false, for I myself accompanied him to Hoo-chow-foo where we separated never to meet again. Whether he is alive or dead I cannot say; but never shall I forget the words and looks of that god-like, noble young prince as we bade one another farewell for the last time, to go our respective ways as fugitives—without home, place or kindred, all whom we loved and cherished on earth having perished by famine or sword—after years of strife and suffering for the land we had hoped to save."

Here the old man's voice became hoarse, and he ceased speaking. For some minutes he seemed lost in unutterable memories of the long-gone sacred past; and his emotion was so apparent, yet so profound, that it enforced respectful silence, and excited sympathy. Then again composing himself, he leaned forward, and with tears in his age-brightened eyes, laid his hand upon his pupil's arm and regarded him fondly.

"There is something more I must tell you, Ah-tin," he said gently. "My reason for at first taking such a liking to you—apart from my respect for your worthy father—was that I saw in you a striking resemblance, both morally and physically,

to my early leader and compeer, the Chung Wang, who was full of noble aspirations and studious ways, and was fired with a spirit of justice and strong sense of the wrongs endured by his unhappy countrymen. He had your lofty bearing, high intellectual brow, and frank chivalrous nature and, if I am not mistaken, your future will be the counterpart of his. Think what a splendid recompense it will be to you in future years to feel, perhaps, that you have practically changed the destiny of the people of your land, bringing them out of bondage to freedom; and that long after your earthly career will have terminated, your name will be fondly remembered and, with the glorious record of your deeds, handed down to all posterity as the benefactor of an empire—as the saviour and defender of your own dear native land."

"Sir, you fill me with noble purposes and bold-spirited ideas," said Cheng, the colour mantling to his face, and his breath coming quickly as he knelt and bowed before his venerable master. "And I bless and thank the gods, sir, that they have given me such a wise instructor and good counsellor as you in my youth. May I prove myself worthy of your exhortation, your trust, your paternal care!"

As his master helped him to rise, he continued: "Since you have so greatly honoured me, sir, by taking me into your confidence, I can but reciprocate the favour, and the kindly feeling which prompted it, by also communicating to you a secret which my father lately entrusted to my keeping. You remarked, sir, that I strongly resemble the Chung Wang. Let me tell you that the members of our family are closely related to that illustrious chieftain; and though we did not actually join in that great

rebellion, we contributed large sums of money towards its furtherance. Of course, were this known to the Government, we should all be summarily tried, condemned, and executed, and our property confiscated."

"My dear Ah-tin, your information still further strengthens the bonds of love and friendship which exist between us, and your confidence shall never be betrayed," said Mr. Wong, rising as his visitor was about to depart. "You have a great future before you—of that I feel convinced. Be virtuous, dear Ah-tin, that you may be healthy, and healthy that you may be virtuous; and the two combined will make you noble and brave. Follow the tenets of our Great Master and remember his advice: 'Combat night and day against thy vices; and if by thy care and vigilance thou gainest the victory over thyself, courageously attack the vices of others, but attack them not before this be done.' Be also prayerful and discreet, having faith in Providence, that you may be bold, but not reckless—for valourous prudence engenders the greatest strength, insomuch that it ensures ultimate victory, though the latter be hard and laborious to achieve.

"Farewell, dear friend, for the present; and may the gods bless you and be with you—with you now and in the great days of long futurity!"

Cheng again prostrated himself before his tutor and, having received his blessing, took leave of him. That conversation had made a deep and indelible impression upon his reflective mind, and was destined to strongly influence his future conduct. On his return home he found his father busily engaged in burning silver-paper sycee in order to propitiate the avaricious spirit which he instinctively felt had attached itself to his person.



CHAPTER IV

THE HUNG LADIES

The reader has not yet been introduced to the female members of Mr. Hung Fong's happy though somewhat small family, who were not visible to strangers nor easily approached, for their apartments were kept select and secluded. But as they are fated to assume an important *rôle* in this narrative, it is only proper that their acquaintance should be made.

Mr. Hung was in many respects an abstemious man, and had only taken unto himself two wives, the first of which had borne him a son and daughter of whom he was justly proud. Mrs. Hung Lee-fah, the first wife, was a woman of fifty or thereabouts, who had evidently been very handsome in her earlier days; for much of the freshness and bloom of youth still lingered about her kind and comely face, which was further enhanced by the charms of a brilliant intellect which, in man or woman of whatsoever nationality, never fails to impart a something noble and yet sweet in the expression. It was easily seen that she was a native of the sunny south by her high, intellectual brow, dark, almond-shaped eyes, and

somewhat broad-based nose ; while in accordance with the prevailing fashion her feet were of the approved "golden-lily" pattern, as the unnaturally small and cramped feet of Chinese ladies are poetically called. Her hands were small and shapely, and her *tout ensemble* elegant ; she was an excellent wife and mother, and her husband and two children were her constant care and pride. And when the good merchant, after the affairs of the day were over, sought diversion and rest in the bosom of his family, she would lay aside her reading or embroidery and please his ear with homely songs of other days, to which she accompanied herself on the silken stringed pipa (lute), or would relate some of the many quaint old stories and legends treasured in her deep-musing mind.

Through the misleading accounts of travellers and others who have not had the opportunity or taken the trouble to really study the social life of the Chinese—perhaps regarding the theme as *infra dignitatem*, and in consequence have made up for this deficiency by colouring the truth with an unduly large percentage of fiction—comparatively nothing is known respecting the nineteenth-century Chinese lady. Her manner of living, her characteristics and accomplishments are either shrouded in mystery or misunderstood. She is generally described as, or supposed to be, a poor uneducated *fainéante* creature, more ornamental than useful—the toy and slave of her capricious lord and master, whose pipe-filling forms her chief occupation. Certainly the minor wives of a Chinese gentleman often lead anything but an opulent life—sometimes a miserable one. It all depends upon the first

wife, on whom they are supposed to wait, and whose will to them is law. If she be a kind-hearted, humble-minded woman, like Mrs. Hung Fong, then all goes well and they are generally a happy sisterly party; but even in the most united and best regulated families, petty jealousies and disagreements are apt to disturb the wonted tranquillity and cause periods of unhappiness.

Mr. Hung Fong's second wife, Ah-choi by name, by whom he had had one child which had died in its infancy, was a woman with a mysterious and questionable history—by no means an uncommon circumstance among the inferior wives, who are not really married, according to the rites and ceremonies of Chinese custom, but are adopted. She was a native of Soochow, which is famed throughout the "Celestial Empire" for its comely damsels, and though of mature age, was no exception to the rule. Her face was full and oval, her complexion delicate and very fair, being also enhanced by artificial means, and her nose of the Grecian type. But although her mouth was small and her chin piquant, they betrayed more firmness than tenderness; and in spite of her eyes being large, deep-lashed and lustrous, they lacked the softness which denotes a kind and generous nature.

Unlike Mrs. Lee-fah, her feet had never been cramped, but nevertheless were naturally small. Mr. Hung had casually met her during a visit he had paid to the northern treaty-port of Shanghai, some three or four years after his first marriage—under what circumstances no one knew,—and he became so enamoured of her charms that she accompanied him back to his

home in Lien where she soon exercised considerable authority *in loco parentis*.

Regarding her parentage and early life, she had always been very reticent, perhaps discreetly so, but undoubtedly she had acquired considerable knowledge of the world and even a smattering of the English language. In spite of Mr. Hung's attachment to his first wife, this woman exercised a strong influence over him; and she took every advantage of his good nature to usurp the dominion which by right belonged to the lawful wife who, being of a sweet and gentle disposition, was much imposed upon, although she failed or pretended not to notice it. Cheng was the only member of the family over whom Mrs. Ah-choi could not domineer, for he was self-willed and passionately devoted to his mother, who in every way reciprocated his affection. In consequence of this he was secretly disliked and feared by the second wife, whom he treated with cold but courteous indifference.

With the daughter it was different. Miss Luh-hwa, for such was her name, was fondly attached to her parents and her brother, but somehow she feared this half-mother who, however, always appeared to treat her with great kindness, and to evince quite a maternal interest in her welfare and accomplishments. The real secret of this adopted wife's acquisition of authority over the daughter was that from the first she had engrafted into her young and susceptible mind the most grossly superstitious ideas, upon which she had been accustomed to work, thus gradually paving the way to absolute control over her thoughts and actions. Her motive for doing this must for the present remain a mystery—unless it was that it

pleased her vanity to make this young and beautiful girl subservient to her will.

Luh-hwa was now sixteen years of age. Like most Chinese damsels she was somewhat short, but possessed a faultlessly symmetrical figure and a full, delicately-complexioned face, which is considered the *beau ideal* of oriental beauty. Her forehead was high, her eyes almond-shaped, deeply fringed and of a liquid black colour, her eyebrows upward-curving from the nose which was straight, but broad at the base, and her mouth small and well-shaped; while her pink bow-shaped lips, being generally half-parted, revealed a row of the most even and pearly teeth which—with their coral-coloured settings—looked more artificial than real in their perfectness.* She was the exact counterpart of what her amiable and worthy mother had been in her youth; indeed, their present resemblance was striking. She was of the same noble and generous nature, but though stronger minded, was very superstitious, and—believing no ill of anyone—could have been easily deceived and imposed upon by a designing person.

On this sunny new year's morning the ladies of the Hung Fong family and their amahs† were congregated in their general reception-room, which looked out upon a picturesque expanse of landscape garden that comprised a variety of charming miniature scenes. Surrounding it were small mountains of rockwork, some covered with grass and others well wooded with dwarfed

* It may interest some ladies to learn that the "Daughters of Han" are very fastidious with regard to the tooth-brushes they use; those with short and stiff bristles being the kind usually preferred, and they generally keep a good stock of new ones by them.

† Female attendants.

plants and trees, mostly of a tropical nature ; while here and there a liliputian temple or pagoda peeped from among bright-hued foliage and flowers, or stood alone artistically relieving the sterility of some tiny eminence. The landscape was further enhanced by three miniature lakes spanned by quaint wickerwork bridges, and a larger one upon whose surface water-lilies placidly floated, while gold-fish sported among their slender stems, sending bubbles to the mirror-like surface, to which they now and again darted to catch an unsuspecting insect and then disappear with silvery-sounding splash into the shadowy depths below. Round the sides of this sylph-like retreat were large trees, beneath the far-spreading foliage of which were cool summer houses, and marble lounges embosomed in arbours covered with escalating vines and creepers ; and at the north-eastern corner of the enclosure was a romantic grotto of considerable dimensions. Along the rocky sides of this artificial cavern white, red, and yellow chrysanthemums bloomed in wild profusion, thriving in the cool atmosphere, and at the further end a small shrine—dedicated to the divinity supposed to preside over these fairy-like haunts—lent enchantment and imparted an air of mysticism and solemnity, which was intensified by a vapourous cloud of bluish smoke, proceeding from burning joss-sticks, which enveloped the altar and its vicinity, and diffused fragrant perfumes of sandalwood and garoo.

There was something very sweet and pleasant about that quiet place—something altogether conducive to the meditation and repose so dear to all cultured minds. Beneath those shady trees



and arbours, and among those sequestered flower-lined paths which wound their way among diversified scenes of surpassing beauty, the ladies of the Hung family lived their uneventful lives in reading, working embroidery, in which their country people have always excelled, and listening to or telling those strangely fascinating fairy-tales and historic legends that exercise such a powerful influence over the thoughts and actions of the women of the remote "Middle Kingdom," to whom the outside world and other shores are but dreamland wonders surrounded—like the unknown star-worlds in the blue vault of heaven—by an impenetrable halo of romance and mystery, which they may never hope to unravel or explore except in imagination and through the vague uncertain tales and rumours which come, like the wandering wind, no one knows from where.

Through their life of seclusion the Chinese women become great thinkers and wonderfully philosophical, and, being naturally studious and superstitious, have a fund of curious knowledge. They can tell no end of marvellous stories, and their credulity is really astonishing. They will seriously warn the husband or brother against the fairy-fox which has grown so old that it can transform itself into a beautiful young damsel with whom he would surely fall desperately in love, and who in return would educe his strength by her diabolical power, and cause his death.

Like us, the Chinese have their favourite books, though with them one good work, which has stood the test of time, is a source of endless amusement. It is not discarded for some newer one—age being the highest recommendation for anything in

the "Celestial Empire," where the worship of ancestors forbids advancement and encourages retrograde movement and thought. The most popular literature in China is the historical romance; and of this class the book that ranks first is the "San Kwoh Chai," the plot of which is laid during the stirring times at the fall of the Han dynasty (A.D. 168 to 265), and is full of mystery. "The Dream of the Red Chamber," which deals with domestic life, is certainly the most celebrated novel, though its tone is not always moral, being somewhat after the style of the "Decameron." But the work that is held in the highest esteem, by all classes, for its purity of style is the "Pastimes of a Study," which abounds in mysterious and thrilling tales.

The ladies were now busily engaged in packing and despatching several round baskets with various kinds of fruit and confectionery, comprising preserved ginger, almonds, raisins, pea-nuts, melon seeds, lychees, lungans, pumeloos, oranges, cakes, sweets, and other delicacies. These were the customary new year gifts, each of which was accompanied by a small vermilion-coloured packet of silver and copper coins, given to ensure luck during the ensuing year. All being in readiness, these baskets were carried by the amahs round to the houses of the female relatives and friends of the family; and as they delivered these friendly offerings the recipients profusely expressed their good wishes and thanks, and having bestowed upon them presents of silver and cash, also wrapped in red paper, proceeded to burden them with return presents of a similar kind—if they had not already forwarded them.

Having seen the last basket carefully packed and sent off, Mrs. Ah-choi, the second wife, asked Luh-hwa to accompany her into the garden, which the latter did with pleasure—taking her silken-stringed pipa* with her—as it was a warm, sunshiny day. The first wife was too busy, in superintending certain festive preparations, to join them; so they sauntered forth together. Keeping to the right, they passed along the base of a beetling-browed cliff of fern-clothed rockwork, finally coming to a narrow pass which led through it and down into a small glen surrounded by ragged hills, on whose mossy slopes grew many species of fern and palm. Entering this shady nook they seated themselves upon a marble seat which nestled among the drooping foliage of a willow-tree. A little to the left of them another narrow passage with precipitous sides gave entrance to a wood-encircled glade where—during the long moonlight nights—the garden-god was said to hold his court, while the fairies assembled to dance and play; and, indeed, it was just such a place as once would imagine to be their rendezvous.

This leafy boudoir, in which the two ladies were seated, had been specially constructed and set apart for the second wife's use; and the equally beautiful and secluded glade beyond—which had two entrances, and in the centre of which was a spring-fed fountain that kept the surrounding vegetation moist and the atmosphere pleasantly cool even in the warmest weather—was reserved for Mrs. Lee-

* A balloon-shaped guitar three feet long—its length being typical of heaven, earth and man—while its four strings represent spring, summer, autumn, and winter. The player is guided by twelve frets placed upon the neck of the instrument.

fah, the first wife; and in these romantic retreats much of their leisure was spent.

They had been sitting there for some time, when suddenly Ah-choi—as we will in future call Mr. Hung's second wife—gave a sharp frightened cry, which so startled Luh-hwa that the music abruptly ceased with a discordant twang, and the instrument nearly dropped from her hands as she followed her companion's terrified gaze, which was fixed upon a long yellow snake, with black rings round its body, that reared its glossy head in their direction, while its bright scintillating eyes seemed to fascinate and hold the woman spell-bound. It lay upon the green sward in front of them, about six feet away. Luh-hwa, who was not of a nervous temperament, or easily frightened, was rising to her feet to drive it away, or call the attendants, when Ah-choi—without removing her fear-stricken gaze from the reptile—mechanically clutched her wrist and detained her; while her lips half inaudibly uttered numbers, as if she were counting the moments of suspense that passed. Luh-hwa sank back to her seat and her superstitious fears being now aroused, her eyes involuntarily fixed themselves upon the snake, and she was beginning to feel its mesmeric influence when, to their relief, its head gradually dropped to the ground, and it glided into the undergrowth on their right.

“Balau!” ejaculated Ah-choi in an ominous undertone, when she had regained her self-possession. “That snake's appearance is a bad omen. Before ten moons have passed there will be a death in our family. We must try and avert the calamity by having a small shrine built for the snake and placed just there, where it disappeared.



In the meantime we will propitiate the garden-god,* and invoke his aid in preventing another such visitation. Come, let us do so at once, for it is a most serious matter, especially during this festive season."

Forgetful of all else, the two ladies hastened into the house and procuring a sheaf of joss-sticks, some strings of crackers, and each a pot of fresh tea, at once entered the grotto. Having lighted the sticks and replenished the sacrificial cups on the altar with warm tea, they prostrated themselves before the imaginary deity, and implored it to exert its beneficent influence in their behalf and protect their family from the threatened catastrophe.

On concluding their supplication they left the grotto and seated themselves upon a marble lounge situated exactly opposite the one they had occupied when disturbed by the reptile.

"I wonder," said Luh-hwa, "whether that snake will remain in this garden: perhaps it has only just come here."

"That may be so, my dear," replied Ah-choi; "but it is quite probable that it will permanently remain here providing the site is suitable to its temperament and inclinations. On the other hand, it may be some spirit which has assumed the form of a reptile for a purpose unknown to us; though I am inclined to believe by its appearance that it is one of those snakes whose age dates from remote antiquity, in which case it would be able to work us great harm, if so disposed, or the reverse. Its appearance was certainly a bad omen. Of course, my dear, you know that when

* Frequently called the "Ground-god."

a snake becomes very, very old, it is endowed with extraordinary supernatural powers, for—besides being able to work marvellous spells and divine the future with the accuracy and skill of a fox-elf, it can transform itself into a human being. If we came and secreted ourselves here on some calm moonlight night, I should not be at all surprised if we saw—instead of the snake—a beautiful young girl emerge from yonder bushes and walk round the garden."

"Oh, I should be frightened! Wouldn't you?" observed Luh-hwa, clasping her hands and involuntarily shuddering as she pictured the ghostly apparition.

"Well, dear, it would be foolish of us to court danger by watching for the serpent-elf, though I doubt whether any harm would befall us. Moreover, my age and lore would be respected, and, although you are young, providing you had not done anything contrary to my wish or hurtful to my feelings, I should be able to protect you. With a man it would perhaps be different, particularly if he encountered a fox-elf; but, of course, you have heard and read all about the hu-lee-jin, in Chu-Shi's works, and in that book called 'Luis-chi-che-yai,' which I lent you."

"Yes, I know," said Luh-hwa, "that foxes live to a great age, and can assume human shape; but how long do you suppose that snakes can live?"

"Well, dear, their ages vary, but I have read of a large white one which was known to be over eighteen hundred years old, and was endowed with marvellous powers, being able to foretell future events and transform itself into a bewitching damsel. This wonderful reptile had lived



for many centuries in the Cavern-of-the-Winds, somewhere in the mountains of Ngan-hoei, but wishing to become more powerful and finding that the mountainous districts were prejudicial to its advancement in this respect, it resolved to change its residence to Hangchow, which is celebrated for the magnificence of its temples and palaces. In this city there lived an immense black snake which could ascend unto the sky and also take human form, and it had resided for over nine hundred years in the beautiful gardens of Prince Chow. The Prince had long been dead, and his pleasure-grounds, which were said to equal those of the Imperial Palace, had been deserted by mankind for so many years that weeds and creepers grew over the summer-houses, pavilions and bridges with which the place was adorned. Nevertheless, the gardens were still very lovely and romantic, and the most exquisite flowers grew in wild profusion everywhere, while the placid lake was covered with water-lilies and teemed with the choicest fish.

"To these rustic haunts the beautiful white snake made its way, and one afternoon—in the form of a young and comely girl—entered through the large gateway. It had not proceeded far, however, when it was confronted by the black snake, which had likewise transformed itself into a female. 'Whence do you come?' demanded the latter, angrily, 'and by what authority do you dare to profane the sacred precincts of my ancient home? Begone, for your presence is unwelcome and unpropitious!' Seeing that the fair intruder did not move or speak, the black snake grew more furious, and drawing closer continued: 'Do you

not know that I have immense power and could slay you without moving a hand?' Then the white snake smiled and answered softly: 'Pray do not boast so loudly of your strength, but quietly listen while I speak. I am the White Snake of the distant Cavern-of-the-Winds, where I have lived for years that stretch far back beyond the age of man or beast. My power has waned through living far above the dewy earth; so, as the gods have told me of this healthy place, I come to live in peace and bear you company.' Instead of being pacified the black snake grew more violent and cried: 'The garden is my own exclusive property, and yet you speak as if it were your own. But as you are so bold and imagine yourself so powerful, let us fight three rounds and see who wins the mastery.'

"The white snake again smiled good-humouredly and replied: 'I did not come to seek an enemy, nor yet to fight or injure one of my own race; but since my peaceful overtures are met with rude disdain, and as you seem so eager for the fray, I now agree to fight you on condition that the vanquished one becomes the victor's slave.' Whereupon the black snake cried aloud in its wrath and, drawing a large sword, endeavoured to exterminate her. But the white snake drew two gleaming swords and, holding them crosswise before her body, muttered a few incantatory words, at the same time glancing heavenward. Immediately afterwards the black snake's weapon was torn from its grasp by an unseen hand and thrown several yards away. 'Spare my life!' it cried, falling upon its knees. 'I see you are the more powerful of the two; so let us desist from further conflict and I will be



your slave.' Then the white snake sheathed her swords and assisted the suppliant to rise. They made peace, and ever afterwards the black snake remained the white one's faithful servant, and in time they learned to love one another like sisters."

"How very nice," said Luh-hwa, as her companion paused; "and are they there now?"

"Yes, I believe so; but that is not all," replied Ah-choi, continuing. "Many years ago there came to Hangchow a very high and wealthy Manchu-Tartar mandarin whose surname was Shao. He was a bad, avaricious man, who had accumulated vast riches by squeezing the poor people of the district over which he had governed: moreover, he was very cruel to his wives. Having retired from official life, he was desirous of finding a suitable residence in which to end his days, and, hearing of the vacant palace of Prince Chow, he determined to make it his home. So that venerable building was renovated, and the beautiful gardens cleared of their weeds and laid out; and when all was in readiness, Shao brought his family there and settled down to enjoy the remainder of his life in peace and happiness. He was charmed with the gardens and often sat there reading and meditating, or listening to the silvery splash of the fish in the lake. One night he seated himself upon a marble lounge in a very lonely and secluded part of the grounds where the foliage was broad and dense; and, as the air was cool and pleasant, he fell asleep. About midnight he awoke with a cold shiver, and was about to return to the house, when suddenly he heard a rustling of silk, and the next moment there stepped from the undergrowth in front of

him a beautiful maiden clothed in pure white silk that shimmered in the pale light of the moon, which was at its full and had risen above the dark tree tops. Never had Shao's gaze fallen upon such a lovely creature as he now beheld, for her gazelle-like eyes were large, lustrous and deeply-fringed with velvety lashes, her mouth was small and curved like a bow, her nose straight and delicate, and her skin as fragrant and fair as the mock-li flower.

"Rising from his seat, he stood for a few moments in mute wonderment and admiration; while the beautiful enchantress wove her fatal spell. At length he found speech, and, bowing deferentially, said, 'Speak, charming goddess of the night, and tell me who you are.' Then timidly approaching a step nearer, the young girl answered him rhythmically, in a voice that was more like ethereal music than a sound from human lips, 'I came with the wandering winds of the night, and like them I always roam; but I saw your kind face and was tempted to pause and ask you to take me home.' The old man trembled with the excitement of his fascination, and, drawing close to her, possessed himself of her small, shapely hand which she allowed to remain passively and confidently in his. He again asked her to tell him who she was, but she replied evasively, saying, 'I have wandered away from a sunny land which I never can find again; but I know you are kind, for you hold my hand, and with you I should like to remain.' Shao could hardly believe his eyes: it seemed more like a blissful dream than a reality, and, knowing that all his household had retired to rest,

he abandoned himself to the intoxicating pleasure of the moment, and lingered with this strange, fair creature in the quiet moonlit gardens which seemed all in keeping with his romantic adventure.

"As they strolled through the silent groves and by the shadowy waters of the lake, his fair companion sang songs which brought back to his memory the happiest days of his bygone life, and he seemed to grow young again. Her songs were like histories, for they told of deeds of chivalry, and of days that were shrouded in the mist of ages. She sang of lovers who had lived and passed away, and had returned to earth again, and of battles fought and victories won in long forgotten ages when this world was in its infancy.

"At length, however, the falling dew made the night air cold, and Shao quietly led his lovely companion up a broad flight of marble steps to his luxuriously-furnished chamber, which was weirdly lighted by the waning moon. All was hushed and dreamy; indeed, there was something almost awful in the stillness that prevailed: and as Shao—with guilty conscience and trembling hand—led this strange, fairylike damsel across the room to his curtained couch, the moon sank down, and darkness closed the final scene. Night passed and day dawned bright and glorious, and the birds sang merrily in the garden of the ancient palace of Prince Chow; but within the building the silence of night still prevailed, and anon strange murmurings and awed voices told that something unusual and dreadful had happened. Then the news rapidly circulated that the master had been found lifeless in his bed, and that spirally circling round his body to his neck, was a deep

red scar like the coils of a snake. But the lovely young girl—with whom Shao had been seen on the previous night by one of the servants—was nowhere to be found. Thus perished the last tenant of the palace of Prince Chow, which has never since been inhabited by man."

"Dear me!" said Luh-hwa, looking half-fearfully around, as if expecting to see a ghost emerge from the bushes. "And are those two powerful snakes still living there?"

"Yes, I have heard so," said Ah-choi; "and the beautiful gardens are again covered with weeds and brambles, and flowers and trees grow over the tessellated pavements of the deserted summer-houses and pavilions, while the palace itself, with its haunted chamber where Shao died, has fallen into ruin, for no one has been there for a hundred years or more."

"But which snake was it that transformed itself into the lovely girl who is supposed to have caused Shao's untimely departure?" asked Luh-hwa, who quite believed that every word of the story was true.

"That remains a mystery, my dear," said Ah-choi. "But some people are inclined to believe that it was the white snake, since it was the more powerful of the two."

The ladies now rose from their seat and walked towards the house, as it was nearly time for luncheon, or *an-jow*, as their mid-day meal is called.



CHAPTER V

THE FESTIVE BOARD

As Ah-choi and Luh-hwa approached the dining-hall, they saw Mr. Hung and Cheng busily engaged in freeing the premises of any malevolent spirits that might be hovering about with questionable intentions, by burning divers long strings of crackers which fizzed and cracked furiously. Luh-hwa, who enjoyed fun of this sort, at once asked her brother to allow her to participate in the fusillade; but he refused on the grounds that the might burn her new silk gown. Whereupon she raked over the smoking debris with the handle of her fan until she found a cracker which had missed fire. This she lighted and, with a merry laugh, threw it into the air, so that it dropped and exploded at Cheng's feet, causing him to nimbly perform some antics which were so totally at variance with his usually dignified deportment that everybody was convulsed with laughter.

They were now joined by Mrs. Hung Lee-fah, who, with her husband, led the way to the festive board which was laden with good things. It was customary in that happy and well-regulated family for all the members of it to partake of the mid-day

and evening meals together, except when there was company, in which case the ladies were rigorously excluded. For when a Chinese gentleman is receiving friends or giving a dinner-party, he never dreams of summoning any of his wives or daughters from their seclusion to entertain even his most intimate friends or relations. There are plenty of "sing-song" women, as they are called, in every city and town, who can be hired for the occasion; and it would be considered positively vulgar to inquire after, or in any way mention the gentler sex, either of host or guest. So far is this rule carried, that when a Chinaman is asked how many children he is blessed with, he invariably gives the number of sons. If, however, he has no male children, he shrugs his shoulders and replies that the gods have not favoured him in this respect, for he has no heir.

As is customary throughout the "Middle Kingdom," the dining-table was oval in shape and composed of an ebony wood frame with a large slab of coloured marble on the top. Being New Year time, it groaned beneath an extra burden of the most tempting fare: though I doubt whether the latter would have been regarded as such by a European. All being seated at the table, a towel saturated with warm water was placed beside each person to answer the purpose of a *serviette*, also a small saucer and short-handled porcelain spoon; and then the first course was served. This consisted of the far-famed birds'-nest soup, which is not—as some Occidentals suppose—extracted from twigs and feathers or other like materials used by the common house-sparrow to build its domicile;

nor do scraggy pieces of moss or feather float about in the liquid. The nests chosen for this purpose are of a peculiar kind constructed out of the hardened mucilage of the swiftlet, which only builds its nest in the lofty cliff-caves of Malaya and Ceylon. The nests are denuded of the feathers and having been thoroughly cleaned of all superfluous matter, are boiled into a gelatinous substance which is considered by the Chinese very nutritious and a great delicacy.

At Mr. Hung's festive board the *table d'hôte* was sufficiently varied and inexhaustible to have pleased the most fastidious "Celestial" epicure; and, although this was not the chief meal of the day, it would occupy an entire chapter to describe the various courses. Therefore, let it be sufficient for me to say that among the many dishes which followed the soup, were chicken liver fried with Manchurian mushrooms and bamboo-tips; pigeons' eggs boiled; ducks' tongues with sauce; sea-slug stew flavoured with chilies; shell-fish and egg sauce; sharks' fins and pork stewed; cold mutton with tomatoes and onions; fish-maw with herb sauce; fowl and duck with tree-mushrooms, pork and rice; devilled crabs with matai; sweet potato and pumpkin; snipe stuffed with radishes and baked yam; coloured dragon-balls with body and legs intact; rice with craw-fish and dried sea-weed boiled; and frog curry and plain boiled rice.

The wines were drunk warm and consisted of superior medicated *samshu* flavoured with jinsen, mild rose-wine for the ladies, and another kind exactly resembling sherry; and for dessert there were superb apples and pears, white and

black grapes from the Gulf of Pechili, oranges from Swatow and Canton, luscious pumeloes and laichees from Amoy, acanthus-berries steeped in spirits, bananas, lungugans, water-melons, peaches, figs, dates, cocoanuts, almonds, pea-nuts, melon-seeds, chestnuts, walnuts, crystallised fruit and preserved ginger, besides other sweets too numerous to mention.

The kind feeling which existed among those present showed itself in many ways. For instance, when Mr. Hung found a particularly tempting morsel of food upon his plate, he would deftly transfer it with his chop-sticks to that of his chief or second wife or daughter; and they would likewise return the compliment. At a dinner party in England it would seem somewhat *outré* for the host to transfer a piece of food from his plate to yours; but in China it is considered a token of amity and esteem; and so politely and delicately is it done, that its meaning could not possibly be misinterpreted.

The conversation having been opened and carried on for some time by the elders of the family, Ah-choi gave an account of the snake episode, and hinted at its significance by advocating the policy of pacification. Mr. Hung evidently realised the grave importance of propitiating this powerful reptile, for he promised that a small shrine should at once be erected to it in that part of the garden in which it had been seen.

"Speaking of snakes," he said, "reminds me of a strange and tragic event which happened some years ago at a place called Tsin-yun, in the province of Chekiang. A comely damsel named Si-fah had been betrothed since childhood to a young



man named Yin-hoi; but having arrived at her eighteenth year preparations were made for the marriage. Both being the children of wealthy people there were many things to be arranged, and it took five hundred coolies two days to carry all the cakes and other gifts which the bridegroom presented to his future wife's parents. The astrologers found what they reckoned to be a lucky day for the nuptial cords to be tied, and at length—amidst the grand music of flutes and cymbals—the red bridal-chair came to fetch Si-fah to her new home. Her friends and amahs-in-waiting at once hurried out to prepare the conveyance for her reception; but suddenly they rushed back in great terror, saying that there was an immense snake coiled up on the seat of the chair.

“Thinking that they were merely jesting, Si-fah went out and, raising the front screen of the carriage, looked in. The only thing which met her gaze was a large sheathed knife; so, not wishing to be delayed, she had the weapon placed in one of her boxes and, entering the chair, ordered the bearers to proceed to the bridegroom's house. The marriage was performed satisfactorily, and the two young people seemed well matched; but when the ceremony and parental reception were over and they retired together to their private apartments, Yin-hoi noticed that his beautiful young wife looked nervous and sad; so he asked her the reason of this. Then she told him what her friends had said, and how she had found the knife; and, as he expressed a desire to see it, she went to her box and brought the strange weapon to him.

“Taking it in his hand, he drew the knife

from its sheath, but had no sooner done so than his head fell off, as if he had been decapitated. Si-fah's screams soon brought her unfortunate husband's relations to the tragic spot; but, when she explained what had happened, they disbelieved what she said and accused her of having murdered him. The poor girl was at once chained and taken before the district magistrate, who also discredited her story, but asked to see the instrument with which the crime had been perpetrated. Since her husband's death, no one except Si-fah had touched the knife, and she had been made to carry it with her to prison as a proof of her guilt. She now took it from beneath her gown and, moving upon her knees to the tribunal, tendered it to her judge, at the same time imploring him not to remove it from the sheath. Being a cruel, tyrannical man, he took no heed of what she said, but with a contemptuous smile, snatched it from her hand and drew the glittering blade from its case. The next moment a cry of horrified surprise burst from those who stood around, for, as the magistrate bared the weapon, his head rolled upon the ground. Strange to say, the terrible knife at once disappeared and was never again recovered; though some relate that, the day after the magistrate died, a large snake was seen passing out of the yamen by the back entrance."

"And what became of poor Si-fah?" asked the ladies in one voice.

"I am glad to say she was quite exonerated from all blame, and was lovingly received back into her late husband's family, where she ever afterwards lived the exemplary life of a fond

and faithful widow and daughter-in-law, being respected and beloved by all who knew her." *

When the meal proper had terminated with a bowl of plain boiled rice, the dessert and sweets received every attention, especially the spiced acanthus berries and candied fruit. The tea was served in tiny cups, and after that the family dispersed. During the afternoon Ah-choi and Luh-hwa made several calls, being carried round in their own private sedan-chairs to the houses of their lady friends; while Mrs. Hung, as we will in future call the first wife, remained at home to receive visitors. When a lady called, she was always accompanied by one or two amahs who walked on either side of the conveyance which was brought through the various gateways and outer yards until the *sancta sanctorum* was reached, when it was lowered to the ground for the occupant to alight. This was done to preclude the possibility of encountering any of the male members of the household who, however, never thought of intruding upon the privacy of the ladies without special permission, and on no account when they were entertaining friends.

While the company drank tea and chatted, a young girl handed round a lacquer-ware tray which was divided into numerous partitions containing an assortment of *bon-bons*, so that each guest could choose the sweetmeat she most fancied. The hostess also had her chased silver hubble-bubble pipe passed round to the company, every lady taking a few whiffs, which necessitated the pipe being refilled and lighted afresh several times,

* It is customary in China for a widow to live in her deceased husband's family.

this duty being performed by another maid-servant who held a smouldering paper spill which she blew into a flame when required ; for Chinese pipes only hold about a quarter of a thimbleful of hay-like tobacco which one inhalation exhausts.

The conversation turned upon the new Taotai's wives, of which he had six. It was rumoured abroad that he was a very exacting and quarrelsome husband, who hardly ever allowed his womenfolk to go out, which rendered their lives almost unbearable. Therefore great sympathy was expressed for them, and after an animated discussion it was unanimously agreed upon that Shun Ming was a nasty old man. As is customary all over the civilised world, the discourse gradually veered round to the last scandal which, in Chinese society, often emanates from the court and is borne afar over land and water by all manner of conveyances, from a wheelbarrow to a pony, until it is published by hearsay throughout the length and breadth of the empire.

During the evening Cheng's venerable tutor called in and had a game of dominoes with Mr. Hung, who persisted in making him drink several bumpers of hot samshu, feeling grateful to him for having so admirably trained his son both in wisdom and morality. The good old man thoroughly enjoyed himself, and made excellent company, having seen and observed much of the peoples and places of that vast empire. After wishing health and prosperity to patron and pupil, and having helped them to fire off a *feu-de-joie* of crackers, he took leave, and Cheng walked home with him.

It was a beautiful moonlight night and, as they

strolled along, the young student—who knew that a gigantic squeeze was meditated by the Taotai—asked his master's opinion regarding the advisability of his father contributing towards the proposed repairs, and the amount he might be expected to give.

"Well, Ah-tin," said the old man shrewdly, "the hawk is an exceedingly dignified and voracious bird and, when it settles in any district, it regards the rest of the feathery inhabitants as its legitimate prey, and forthwith commences to treat them accordingly, worrying the lean kind and feasting upon the fat.

"Once upon a time there came to a quiet and happy neighbourhood a crafty old hawk which had long been held in dread by the feathery tribes; for he rendered an account to no one but the great vulture of the north. As was his custom, he pretended to have the welfare of the place and its inhabitants nearest at heart, and commenced operations by inviting a number of well-conditioned birds to accompany him on a short tour round the neighbourhood, ostensibly for the purpose of discovering which of the surrounding hedges required trimming and repairing. Some of the unsophisticated birds felt highly exalted and elated at being asked to join the all-powerful hawk on his tour of inspection; but a few of the wiser ones—although they accepted the invitation—did not avail themselves of it and, when the time came, made a plausible excuse, saying that sickness or urgent business unfortunately prevented them from enjoying the coveted honour and pleasure of participating in this commendable enterprise. Nor did they afterwards regret having

done so, for—while out with his chosen party—the hawk became so ravenously hungry that immediately they returned he devoured the poor birds which had accompanied him. Then he proceeded to single out and try the condition of his future victims by pulling out a few feathers from each and probing them with his beak, knowing that it is not always those with the most plumage that have the plumpest bodies. Having in this manner tested the feather and food-providing capacity of each bird, he chose the fattest and at leisure demolished them piecemeal.

“So you see, dear Ah-tin, that the feather-pulling part of the process was by no means the worst,” added the old man. Continuing, “You and I are among the birds of Lien, at the head of which stands your honourable father, who—although he has wisely determined not to make one of the hawk’s party for the proposed visit of inspection—will nevertheless be obliged to subscribe liberally, or provoke such displeasure that far worse might befall him. This preliminary squeeze is only the feather-pulling part of the scheme, and it is to be sincerely hoped that, after having fleeced the inhabitants of some plumage, the hawk will not devour the fattest, which has too often been done. In order, therefore, to avoid trouble, it would be wise and expedient for all those birds who are to be plucked to hold a private meeting for the purpose of ascertaining the amount of feathers each is prepared to shed. Then let them, to a certain extent, equalise the amounts, so that the hawk cannot reasonably complain of one bird in particular.

“Unanimity is very necessary in a case like

this, as it gives individual strength. In a serious crisis, disastrous results often ensue through want of coalition among the parties concerned. For instance, one day a bittern happened to be pecking some food that lay in close proximity to a mussel which was sunning itself on the sea shore. The latter quickly closed its shell, nipping and imprisoning the bird's beak. Said the bittern, 'there will surely be a dead mussel if you don't release me to-day or to-morrow'; and the mussel answered, 'there will surely be a dead bittern if I don't choose to come out to-day or to-morrow.' While they were wrangling a fisherman came along and seized them both."

"Oh, sir, said Cheng, eagerly, "have you made known your views to my father?"

"No, dear Ah-tin," replied Mr. Wong, gently, "I did not wish to mar so happy an evening by alluding to a subject which must necessarily be distasteful to him. But as you have confided to me his appreciable sentiments and fears, I leave you to convey to him my humble suggestions."

They now arrived at their destination; and—after receiving on bended knee his aged tutor's blessing—Cheng retraced his steps, and, on arriving home, at once prepared for worship at the temple, since he had not attended with the family on the previous night to perform the customary New Year ceremonies, having stayed indoors with his father and helped him to entertain a party of relations and friends. Being anxious to make up for these shortcomings, Mr. Hung had already gone to "joss," for it was nearly twelve o'clock; so taking with him a packet of sacrificial candles, two sheaves of joss-sticks and some silver paper folded

to represent shoes of sycee—these things being carried by a male attendant—our young friend proceeded on his way.

The city temple stood on the western side of a large square, which during the morning was used as the market-place, and was over-looked from the side windows of the apartments used by the ladies of Mr. Hung Fong's family. This ancient though well-preserved fane, which had been built in the Sung dynasty (A.D., 1129—1280), was partly enclosed by a high iron railing with broad gates which were seldom closed. On the inside of the outer entrance, flanking a walk of tessellated pavement, stood two square granite pedestals, each surmounted by a fabulous beast of ferocious aspect holding a red ball in its capacious jaws.

Beyond these a broad flight of stone steps stretching across the entire frontage of the building, led to a terrace sheltered by overhanging eaves which were supported by beautifully sculptured pillars of age-stained marble; while the gracefully carved roof was ornamented with blue and white porcelain tiles and coloured stucco-work depicting long-tailed dragons, griffins, and other mythological monsters. Two large folding doors, painted vermilion and embellished with curious paintings of cloud-enthroned genii, gave entrance to the central chamber of the shrine. This was oblong in shape and the walls were richly gilded and decorated with artistic panels and mouldings, chiefly in *alto relievo*. Four deities presided over the sanctuary: Tin Haou, the Goddess of Heaven, Kwang Tai, the God of War, Man Chong, the God of Literature, and Kwun Yam, the Goddess of Mercy, these being impersonated by huge



bronze images which sat there solemnly facing one another, two on either side; and at the foot of each was an incense brasier, a pot in which to place joss-sticks, and a table for votive offerings.

In the centre of the chamber, and facing the entrance, stood a high altar, covered with embroidered cloth, upon which were several small idols representing the chief tutelary spirits of the city, also some vessels and candlesticks of gold and silver. At the rear of the temple was a small tree-shaded courtyard in which were the private rooms of the residential priests, who passed their solitary frugal lives in strict sobriety and celibacy, but were always ready to shelter and feed a weary wayfarer, or invoke a blessing for any poor sorrowing soul.

As Cheng approached the temple, some neatly-dressed labouring coolies, who had been praying and were now sitting upon the well-worn steps and conversing, got up and, standing aside for him to pass, respectfully saluted him. Responding kindly and with great politeness, he gave each man a silver piece and passed on into the building, which was comparatively deserted. Only a subdued light fell upon the grim, immovable images and their gorgeous surroundings—above which vapourous clouds of incense curled in narrow bands; and a priest silently flitted about in the shadowy gloom, his grey vestments being all in keeping with, and adding to, the solemnity of the sombre scene.

The young student was most devout in his prayers, and prostrated himself several times before each god, kneeling and bowing until his forehead touched the inlaid pavement. After rendering thanks and homage to heaven for its

bountiful blessings during the past year, and supplicating a continuance of them in the future, he humbled himself before the God of Literature, and blessed him for having prospered him in his last examination, and petitioned his further indulgence for the approaching one. Having placed several smouldering joss-sticks in the proper receptacles for them, and also fixed and lighted sacrificial candles upon the tables—which his parents had already supplied with sucking pigs roasted whole, and rice, fruit, tea and wine—he knelt and bowed before the large altar at which he made a burnt-offering of silver paper, thus sending a large gratuity to the heavenly hosts who would reward him accordingly. Then he paid his respects to the officiating priest, and before leaving gave him a present for himself, and a liberal donation towards the maintenance of that time-hallowed shrine, which was endeared to him by all the ties a Chinaman holds most dear; for upon its sacred floors generations and generations of his sainted ancestors had knocked their heads in prayer, and there his own beloved father had worshipped as a child.

He was proceeding down the west side of the temple towards the entrance, when his attention was arrested by a young girl who was kneeling before the central altar. He was at once struck with her singular beauty, and—although too studious to be often prepossessed in favour of the gentler sex—he involuntarily paused and, standing within the shadow of a large pillar, intently regarded her, as if he were spell-bound with admiration. The young lady in question was richly apparelled, and, by the cast of her features, was evidently of northern descent; for her nose



was small and aquiline, her face full and very fair, and her eyes unusually large and luminous. She was praying earnestly, and for some time seemed quite unconscious that her every movement was watched by a handsome young Southerner whose earnest eyes were almost, if not quite, as fine and expressive as hers. She happened, however, to unexpectedly turn her gaze in his direction, and their eyes met. With a deep blush, she at once rose to her feet and, walking a few steps in an opposite direction, suddenly disappeared.

Cheng seemed so enchanted with this strange damsel that, contrary to his usual discreet and highly dignified demeanour, he hurriedly walked towards the side entrance by which she had left. To his surprise and dismay he could see nothing of her, and the narrow roadway was quite deserted. This being his first infatuation, he felt a desire to confide his feelings and the story of his adventure to someone whom he could trust, so he resolved to seek his sister Luh-hwa, as she was always kind and sympathetic; and with this intention he hastened out of the temple. Shortly afterwards he overtook his father—who had passed out by another door—and, while they walked home, repeated to him the conversation he had had with his tutor respecting the Taotai's money-squeezing scheme, but said nothing about the *rencontre*.

Mr. Hung seemed very pleased with the advice, and determined to act upon it.

CHAPTER VI

THE MYSTERIOUS LADY

Immediately on his return home, Cheng went in search of his sister. Having arrived at the entrance to the ladies' gardens, he sent a message by an amah asking Luh-hwa whether she would grant him a private interview. The woman soon returned with a satisfactory reply and led him along a winding path to a small grass-plot where all the ladies were sitting together in the moonlight. Mrs. Hung was engaged in a game of dominoes with Ah-choi, Luh hwa was playing the guitar and accompanying it with her soft sweet voice, and their attendants were sitting or standing near them.

As is customary during all festive occasions in "Far Cathay," each lady was nibbling the small cores of dried melon seeds* which, however, did not prevent them from keeping up an animated conversation.

The young man paused for a few moments in

* They p'ace the small, hard seed in the mouth, then evenly split it open with their teeth, and separate the core from the shell with their tongue—a difficult accomplishment which is only acquired by long practice.

happy contemplation of the scene before him, which appealed strongly to his cultivated and naturally artistic taste, being a refined and unique picture of peaceful home life in a united and prosperous family. In the foreground of the scene was the green lawn and the group of fair women with the pale moonlight shimmering upon their dark glossy hair and costly robes of embroidered satin and silk. On either side of them stretched the gardens with their small mirror-like lakes and tributary streams which revealed fantastic bridges, and meandered through shady valleys and round rock-work hills crowned by miniature pagodas, or avenues of dwarfed trees and flowery hedges; and in the background, clumps of feathery bamboos, delicate ferns, and broad-leafed palms, gently swaying in the night-wind, were gracefully thrown into picturesque prominence by a fairy-like arch of silvery glittering water ejected by twin fountains which made sweet æolian music that enhanced the solitude of night. And in the near distance, outlined against the clear sky, was the quaint and venerable roof of the city temple rising from a mass of variegated foliage which was further relieved at intervals by other pieces of curious architecture.

Seeing her brother approaching, Luh-hwa got up and, greeting him affectionately, led the way to a marble seat placed beneath a leafy arbour that was situated in a secluded part of the grounds. Then sitting down beside him, she listened intently while he unburdened himself of his secret, with which the reader is already acquainted. He waxed eloquent upon the almost ethereal beauty of the young girl he had seen in the temple, and concluded

by telling how she seemed to suddenly vanish from his sight.

"Ah!" said Luh-hwa ominously, as he paused. "You say she was dressed in very pale blue silk. Was she tall?"

"Yes," he replied quickly, "I forgot to mention that she was much taller than the generality of her sex, and——"

Here Luh-hwa interrupted him by half-mechanically ejaculating the word *hu-lee-jin* in an awed voice.

"What do you mean, dear?" he asked somewhat sharply.

"Mean!" she reiterated significantly; "I mean, my dear brother, that you have had a lucky escape, for that lovely creature was evidently a fox-elf."

"Whatever makes you think so?" he asked with some consternation.

"Because you say that she was tall and dressed in light-coloured clothing, and that she disappeared suddenly. I suppose you were too fascinated and reckless to realise the imminent danger which threatened you, and had it not been for the strong counteracting influence of the subtle essences which you inhaled from the temple, I tremble to think what might have been your fate; for I could name several instances when men have been victimised and killed by the diabolical art of the fox-elf. For example, towards the close of a summer's afternoon, a few years ago, a young man was walking through the fields near his native village, which was situated in the province of Fuhkien, when he beheld at some little distance ahead of him a youthful damsel who kept furtively glancing behind her and quickening her pace.



"Feeling curious to find out who she was—especially as her clothing was of the costliest and most gorgeous kind—he followed her, and at length got sufficiently close to ascertain that she was a young girl of more than earthly beauty. Directly his gaze fell upon her fair face he became quite enchanted and lost all control over himself, being unable to remove his eyes from her; and, although she walked so fast that he had great difficulty in keeping up with her, wherever she went he followed. At length, however, they neared a large forest on the borders of which this strange girl waited for him to approach her, a sweet smile illumining her face.

"It was now evening, and a wood-cutter, who was on his way home, saw the young couple standing together, with the warm, golden light of sunset streaming upon them and revealing the magnificent robes and marvellous beauty of the female; and as the night advanced, he saw them disappear into the deepening gloom of the forest. The mysterious girl was never seen again, but some days afterwards the young man's lifeless body was found lying at the foot of a large, hollow oak tree.

"So you see, dear Cheng, the most captivating damsels are sometimes the most to be dreaded."

He was about to make some remark, when Ah-choi emerged from a tree-lined pathway, accompanied by an amah. For reasons only known to herself she always endeavoured to prevent the brother and sister being together, and, when they were, she seldom left them alone for long. Smiling complacently, she expressed a hope that she was not intruding and, dismissing her attendant, seated

herself beside Luh-hwa, who appealed to her for corroboration of the fox story.

"Yes, my dear, it is quite true," she replied seriously; "and I will tell you of a similar case which happened within my memory. When I was in Shanghai I heard of the strange death of a young man who lived in a village situated some miles up the Huang-pu river. It appeared that one evening, when walking homeward through the fields, he noticed that his footsteps were persistently dogged by a tall woman whom he could not see distinctly, as it was getting dark and she kept some distance behind him.

"Being curious to learn who this remarkable individual was, he stopped and waited for her to pass. When she drew near he was astonished to find that she was a lovely and richly apparelled girl with moon-like eyes, angelic form and golden-lily feet; and as she passed him a sweet smile further enhanced her many charms. For a moment or two the young man seemed quite spell-bound, and stood there by the pathside with his eyes intently fixed upon the fair damsel, who walked slowly onward, now and again looking slyly back at him. Then a tremor of excitement passed through him, and his heart palpitated violently as he quickly pursued and overtook her. Laying his hand upon her arm, he begged her to pause and listen to him—which, of course, she did—and there and then he confessed that she had bewitched him and that he should like her to become his wife.

She pretended to be very surprised at this proposal, but, after some consideration and maidenly hesitation, consented on condition that the marriage was kept a secret from her family,

as they wished her to remain single. He readily agreed, and the nuptial cords were duly tied, and all went well for a month or two. At the end of that time the husband—who had always been strong and healthy—gradually grew thinner and weaker. Moreover, he was troubled because his beautiful bride invariably persisted in leaving the house before sunrise and remaining away until after the sun had set; and, when he asked her the reason of this, she always made the excuse that her mother was very old and an invalid, and in consequence required her constant care and attendance throughout the daytime.

When he asked to be allowed to see this afflicted parent, he was curtly reminded of his promise; but at length he grew suspicious and one day insisted upon seeing her, particularly as she caused him so much anxiety and inconvenience: for his home was neglected and rendered miserable through his wife being constantly absent when she should have been attending to domestic affairs. So it was arranged that he should accompany her on the morrow. Next day the journey was postponed under some cunning pretext, the day after he was unwell, and from that time forth he rapidly declined, withering away until one morning he was found dead in his bed. Before sunrise his comely wife had been seen to leave the house as usual, but she never returned again; for in reality she was a fox-elf who had absorbed the poor man's strength, and thus perfected her own constitution by ruining his and causing his demise.

"It certainly behoves young men to be careful," added Ah-choi, looking askance at Cheng, who—although he fully credited these tales—was not in

the least convinced that there was anything vulpine or uncanny about his fair *inamorata*; and he secretly resolved to try and see her again and, if possible, find out who she really was.

He now accompanied the two ladies back to the central part of the grounds where they found Mr. and Mrs. Hung engaged in earnest conversation. At the request of her brother, Luh-hwa played and sang some quaint old love-songs: for he was of a romantic turn of mind, and the tranquil splendour of the night seemed all in keeping with his meditative mood. Thus closed one of those calm and happy evenings which, in after years, he was destined to recall and dwell upon with sweet though sad reverence and emotion: for these were the rosy halcyon days of irresponsible youth, when the world and its vanities loomed ahead amidst the mystic grandeur and sublimity of hope and imagination.

Life is the same to all peoples: the past is a picture composed of many pigments which resist time and grow brighter as we advance in years; but a picture whose imperfections grow more glaring when viewed by the sober light of age; while the future is a glittering pathway of promise, which seems—like the moon's reflection upon the sea—to broaden into greater glory as it stretches ahead, whereas, in reality, it only begins and ends in a wilderness of trackless waters.

For some days Cheng religiously frequented the temple in hopes of catching a glimpse of the mysterious lady; but his quest was in vain, and at length he abandoned it in despair, half believing that what his sister had surmised about the fox-elf was true. His favourite walk was upon the city walls,



and one afternoon, while there, he passed a sedan chair which was placed upon the ground—perhaps to give the bearers a rest—and guarded by two amahs who stood on either side of it. The brief and unobtrusive glance he obtained through the gauze-covered side-window of the conveyance convinced him that the occupant was none other than the lady he sought ; so, walking on for some distance, he leaned over the parapet, keeping one eye on the chair and the other on the surrounding landscape of which he had a splendid view.

Directly beneath him, on the outside of the high, lichen-clad walls, a narrow road skirted the moat for some distance and then struck through a small wood and across a stretch of park-like country that was intersected from east to west by a picturesque stream which wound its way, like a silver ribbon, round the base of a pagoda-crowned hill, through fields of paddy and avenues of banyan and chestnut trees, being here and there spanned by a fantastic bridge, or lost behind some leafy eminence until, narrowing into a mere thread, it entirely disappeared. In the dim distance, beyond the green waves of undulating country—where the quaint and artistic roof of many an ancient edifice peeped from among the bright foliage of clustering trees and clumps of graceful bamboos—a purple-hued range of hills formed an imposing and romantic background to the charmingly rustic scene.

At length the chair proceeded on its way, accompanied by the female attendants; so Cheng turned back and followed it, taking care to keep a respectable distance behind lest he should betray his inquisitiveness. After leaving the walls by a

steep circuitous route, it passed into one of the main thoroughfares, and, when the centre of the city was reached, crossed the market place and turned into a narrow alley-way beside the temple.

Cheng quickened his steps, not wishing to lose sight of his quarry, and just arrived at the corner of the passage in time to see the rear-shaft coolie and the amahs disappear through a door which communicated with the back premises of the yamen. Casting an exploring gaze around, he espied a small lattice-window situated a little beyond and some feet above the entrance in question; but the former was closed, and he turned away in rather a perplexed and disconsolate frame of mind, wondering what relationship existed between this fair *demoiselle* and the old Taotai; whether she was a wife or a daughter.

This time he kept his own counsel and did not say anything to his sister; and that night, at about nine o'clock, he went round to the temple, but, not seeing anyone there, left by the side door leading into the alley-way which was quite deserted. He was now at the back of the yamen, and, on looking up towards the lattice window already mentioned, his attention was arrested by the dulcet music of a moon-guitar* and a soft voice singing an old ballad of the Tang dynasty, known as "Muk Lan's Parting," which has fourteen verses, commencing thus:—

"Chick, chick, and over again chick, chick,
Muk Lan sits at her door and weaves;
Not heard is the loom, nor shuttles click,
Only is heard the sigh she heaves."

* The *Yueh-chen*, or moon-guitar, consists of a circular sound-board with a short neck upon which are numerous frets to guide the fingering. There are four strings of silk, and the instrument is played with the nail or a plectrum, which is held in the right hand.



For some time he listened entranced, standing there in the full light of the moon with his face upturned, when suddenly the music ceased and the face that haunted him appeared at the window. He was at once seen, and for a moment or two their eyes met and both seemed too surprised and embarrassed to move. Then bowing low—as if in apology for the intrusion—he turned away, and the sound of the lattice being sharply closed made him feel thoroughly ashamed of himself; and as the blood mounted to his face he vowed that he would never make such an ass of himself again. Nevertheless he was obliged to secretly acknowledge that he was deeply smitten; and when, during the pleasant afternoon strolls upon the city walls, he saw his lady-love's sedan-chair coming in the distance, his heart was wont to throb violently; and while it passed him his *mauvaise honte* was so palpable that the amahs, who accompanied the conveyance, soon noticed it, and, indeed, the young lady herself would have been very blind had she not done so too. However, he could never sum up courage to hazard more than a passing glance at her through the curtained window of the chair, but that was sufficiently gratifying to make him watchful and expectant when passing that way; and in time, if she did not take her usual ride, he was disappointed, and went home feeling quite sorrowful.

The young lady always sat bolt upright in her carriage and never seemed to look either to the right or the left, yet once or twice Cheng fancied that she was doing her utmost to conceal a smile or a shame-face, but her fan was artfully raised as a screen, so he guessed that she laughed behind it.

On these rare occasions he felt highly elated, though this was the limit of their acquaintance, and likely to remain so; but one afternoon all the seeming *insouciance* on the lady's part was more than compensated for by her bestowing upon him a most amiable and winning smile, which, of course, was not seen by her attendants. The chair had just passed, leaving our young friend in the first transport of joy, when he espied something white and flimsy lying upon the ground a short distance ahead. Hurrying forward and eagerly picking it up, he discovered that it was one of the daintiest handkerchiefs imaginable, being made of fine pale blue silk bordered with gossamer lace, and bearing in one corner the name Ah Leen deftly worked with crimson silk.

This prize—which he flattered himself had been intentionally dropped, and to which a delicate perfume clung—was consigned to a silver casket and kept as a cherished memento, for he was soon leaving his native place for Canton, where he hoped to gain the second degree of Chu-jin. Having thus learned his lady-love's Christian name, enabled him to ascertain that she was not one of the Taotai's wives, as he had feared, but his only daughter. This was highly gratifying to his tender passion; but, strange to say, after that incident she seemed to avoid seeing him and seldom went on the city walls, which circumstances he ascribed to her maidenly shame at having betrayed her sympathy and fellow-feeling for him.



CHAPTER VII

THE MISSIONARY

Towards the close of a bright afternoon in spring a solitary horseman approached the city of Lien, coming from the south-east. He was a young man of athletic mould, square at the shoulders, small at the waist and evidently tall, for his legs nearly touched the ground on either side of the hardy little Tientsin pony he bestrode. He wore a brown holland jacket buttoned up close to the neck, tight breeches of the same material, and riding-boots, while his head-gear consisted of a once white pith helmet somewhat the worse for wear and weather. A large knapsack was strapped on his back, and a carefully rolled "swag" was slung across the saddle-bows, and these constituted the only luggage he carried.

Although bronzed with long exposure to the sun, he was decidedly handsome, and his bearing being erect and dignified gave him a military appearance; but he looked weary and travel-stained, which indeed he was, having journeyed all the way from Canton.

Perhaps the reader has already recognised in the lone horseman an old acquaintance; if not, let

me once more introduce him to Herbert Montrose, formerly of the Indian Civil Service, but now an independent missionary in China.

Nearly three years had elapsed since that memorable summer's morning when we saw him depart from Arch Hall; and, with the exception of a month or two, the whole of that time had been spent in studying the Chinese language at Hongkong, in order to fit himself for the noble and arduous work he had undertaken.

Day was fast declining, and the city was still a couple or three miles ahead; so, not wishing to be shut outside the walls when the gates were closed at sundown, the horseman urged his jaded steed into a trot. After riding some distance through well-cultivated undulating country, he came to a vast unenclosed cemetery where generations and generations of the inhabitants of Lien slept side by side in their narrow beds. With that reverential awe which characterises true gentility and refinement, he dismounted and, helmet in hand, walked his horse along the circuitous path that led past many curious sepulchres: Omega-shaped tombs of the rich, simple unadorned mounds of the poor, bricked-up coffins of those awaiting interment, and gorgeous shrines approached by pavements flanked with statues or flights of marble steps, marking the pompous burial-place of mighty mandarins—all levelled by the grim republican, Death.

Leaving the consecrated ground behind, he again mounted his pony and soon entered a grand though natural avenue of oak, banyan and chestnut trees intermingling with tree-palms, bamboos and other tropical vegetation, the variegated



foliage of which was exquisitely tinged with the warm rays of the setting sun. On emerging from these umbrageous portals, the picturesque creeper-covered walls of the city—old, massive and magnificent, breathing an air of time-hallowed antiquity—loomed up close ahead, vividly bringing back to the traveller's memory sacred scenes of the Holy Land.

The path now diverged to the left, skirting the margin of the moat, which resembled a broad ditch, the sides being covered with grass, reeds and bushes ; and, as Montrose neared the south gate of the city, he saw numbers of people, rich and poor, young and old, approaching it from different directions, some returning from a country walk, and others coming home from their work in the fruitful fields where their forefathers had toiled before them. At the same time many rustic sounds met his ear : the drowsy songs of labouring coolies and light-hearted peasants, the tinkling of mule-bells, and the creaking of quaint wheelbarrows loaded with passengers or merchandise ; while the distant voices of children and the barking of dogs imparted a cheerful feeling of homely welcome which tranquillised the stranger's mind.

As Montrose drew near the gate, crowds clustered round him, for a foreigner was indeed a novel sight ; and had he been an African savage, or an Indian in battle array, he could not have attracted more attention, or have made a greater sensation. Some people actually felt his clothes in order to ascertain what material they were made of, and others bent down to closely examine his boots, while one and all ogled him with intense curiosity, at the same time making all manner of

conjectures and observations respecting his business and appearance. He was met at the gate by a petty mandarin who refused him admittance within the walls until he had shown his passport, which was at once produced; and, as is customary in that misgoverned empire, it was retained until the "barbarian" had paid the official a "squeeze" of ten dollars, which, of course, was an illegal demand.

However, not wishing to cause any ill feeling, or expose himself to insult and inconvenience, Montrose prudently paid the money, and, having exchanged civilities with the sordid guardian of the gate, passed through the tunnel-like entrance—which showed the immense thickness of the walls—and proceeded along the main thoroughfare, his footsteps being persistently dogged by a crowd of inquisitive men and boys, some of whom ventured to interrogate him regarding his age, profession and nationality, and his motive for visiting Lien. To these questions he answered politely and patiently, being eager to make a good impression among the citizens and gain their confidence, though he was very fatigued and much in need of rest. The majority of the people were polite, and a few seemed inclined to be friendly, yet none of them appeared disposed to give him shelter, particularly when it became known that he was the missionary who had been expected; for the authorities had previously received intelligence of his departure from Canton and his probable destination, there being in China a regular system of espionage over European travellers.

On asking the reason of this inhospitable



treatment, he received a hint that they feared to provoke the Taotai's displeasure by encouraging a foreigner to stay in the city ; so he concluded that they had been warned not to give him lodging, and, feeling thoroughly indignant, at once made his way to the yamen. On arriving there, he tethered his pony to a post and, mounting the broad steps, passed unchallenged through the large gates into the first courtyard, where a number of Tartar soldiers were lounging about. They immediately gathered round him, altogether barring his progress, and rudely demanded his business there. He replied that his business was with the Taotai, and endeavoured to pass on, but one of them caught hold of his arm and said that he must pay toll or they would not allow him to go any further.

Being naturally a determined man, and in no mood to be trifled with, he resented this interference, knowing that the rascals were only trying to extort money from him because he was alone and defenceless, and, thrusting the fellow aside, he strode on amidst jeers and execrations. Mounting the steps of the second building, he came to a wooden door which was ajar, but on pushing it open he was confronted by an elderly man, who seemed not a little surprised at this intrusion, and at once raised an alarm. Two petty mandarins now appeared upon the scene and, after asking Montrose a thousand questions, took his passport and card, and ushered him into an inner waiting-room until they had communicated with the great *taipan*, their master, and had learned his pleasure. While he was there several Tartar gentlemen of various degrees, some wearing white buttons and

others gilt, came prying and winnowing all the information they could out of him: how old he was, who and what was his father, what was his "honourable name," where had he come from, how long had he been in China, and how much money was he worth.

As these questions were quite in accordance with the rules of etiquette and merely combined inquisitiveness with a friendly interest, Montrose answered them *more probato*: that is, he spoke depreciatingly of his humble self and always left a margin in his replies—a something for the imagination to fill in. After being kept in durance vile for fully an hour, a smug-faced *tingchai*, or messenger, came and returned his passport and informed him that His Excellency Shung Ming—though deeply conscious of the honour paid him—regretted that he was unable to grant Mr. Montrose an interview, as he was occupied with important affairs of State, but that he should be pleased to see him some other day. The very fact of an underling being sent with the message and to return the document—particularly since it had, in the first instance, been handed to an official—implied an intentional slight which the Englishman was not slow to perceive, though he was too much the gentleman, and too well versed in Oriental comity, to show his chagrin, more especially as he knew that, had he done so, it would have given great satisfaction.

As he passed out, he bowed politely to the mandarins who were standing about, though he was cognisant of a tittering and whispering among them which evinced their amusement and gratification at the tardy reception accorded to the



*yang-quaitz** This news preceded him, and, while he made his way through the gateways and courtyards, the demeanour of the porters was arrogant in the extreme, and the soldiers and runners openly apostrophised him in the most insulting and malicious manner.

On leaving the yamen, he proceeded through the western portion of the city, and after a time managed to obtain a stall and fodder for his tired pony by agreeing to pay fifty cents a day to the proprietor of a small inn, who said that his house was then full, but that in a few days he might be able to accommodate both man and beast. This was poor consolation, though Montrose was thankful for all mercies, and pleased to have found food and shelter for his faithful animal; so, walking on, he turned out of the broad thoroughfare into a narrow street which soon took him to a neighbourhood tenanted by the poorer classes. Here the people became more inquisitive still, and, moreover, numbers of fierce-looking dogs emerged from divers places and commenced growling and snapping at his legs, so that he was obliged to keep facing about to drive them off.

From place to place he wandered, and everywhere met with cold civility, though no one seemed inclined to admit him within their doors. Night came, and the crowd which had followed him gradually dispersed, leaving him alone to further explore the moonlit city and be attacked by its canine scavengers. He was beginning to despair of finding shelter for himself, and was seriously thinking of quitting the place and pursuing his

* *Yang-quaitz* means "foreign-devil" in the Mandarin dialect, and is the denomination applied to Europeans.

journey, when he saw a respectable-looking woman coming down the narrow street towards him.

Addressing her in Cantonese, he explained his woeful plight, adding that he felt very fatigued, having journeyed far. The good woman seemed to take compassion upon him and, looking round to see that she was not observed, motioned him to follow her, which he did. After traversing several alleyways, this good Samaritan passed through a round hole in a wall, and crossing a small courtyard, in which a ruined, tree-shaded temple stood, lifted the latch of a door and admitted him into a small but clean, three-roomed cottage, in the general apartment of which a stalwart man of the coolie class was boiling a pot of rice over a charcoal fire. This man was the husband, and he and his worthy spouse held a consultation, with the result that they agreed to give the missionary a room to sleep in and Chinese food, for the small sum of fifteen thousand cash a month (about fifteen dollars), providing he would endeavour to pass in and out of the house without attracting attention; because, if it became known to the Taotai that he was lodging there, they might get into serious trouble. To these reasonable terms Montrose readily agreed, and furthermore he promised to provide himself and them with the best food procurable while he was there, and, if they made him comfortable, to give each a present when he left.

While they were talking a little boy came in and was introduced to the new lodger with much paternal pride as the only son. He was a smart-looking child and was evidently industrious, for he at once commenced to make preparations for the evening meal by placing several bowls, cups and

pairs of chop-sticks upon a round red-coloured wooden table which stood in the centre of the room.

Besides having acquired the art of manipulating chop-sticks in true Celestial style, Montrose had accustomed himself to Chinese food, and now did ample justice to the plain though wholesome fare that was served.

After the meal, he opened a conversation with the man, whose name was Lao Chin, by asking him how the city was prospering.

"Very badly at present, master," replied Lao, shaking his head and continuing. "Lien used to be a good place for rich and poor alike, but since this Taotai has come, and since our pious and honourable magistrate, Mo Kwang, was succeeded by a northern official named How Seng Wui—whose eyes are bigger than his belly—the city has been miserable; for the rich are unmercifully squeezed and the poor persecuted."

"Yes, master, that's true," chimed in the woman, who was washing the crockery, "my good mistress's father, Mr. Hung Fong, has suffered greatly, yes greatly! A kinder-hearted and juster man than Mr. Hung, the rice merchant, never lived; and since a boy—although his father died wealthy—he has worked diligently."

"Aye, and paid his workmen regularly," interposed the man, speaking as if it was a relief to him to give vent to his feelings. "And not only that, but he has always given liberally to those who needed help, and has supported the city and its institutions."

"Yes," said Mrs. Lao, "and for all that he has been squeezed by the new Taotai out of thousands of taels."

"And will be squeezed out of thousands more," continued the husband. "Yes, master, ruin stares everyone in the face; yes everyone!—because the rich employ the poor; and if our masters are robbed of their money, they cannot pay their workmen. Wages have already fallen, and yet no one dares to say a word, lest he should be dragged before the magistrate, which means being thrown into prison until his small savings have all been taken from him and his family made paupers."

"Dear me," said Montrose, "and is there no remedy for this?"

"That remains to be seen, master," replied Lao, significantly. "We working men have our head-man, and we go by what he says, for, as the proverb teaches, 'One man's plan is short, and two men's plan is long.' There is a great deal of grumbling among the low class of coolies, who are always ready to make trouble because the responsibility does not fall on them: they have nothing to lose, and are very ignorant. But there must be a change sooner or later."

"There is one thing I want to find out," said Montrose; "did the Taotai issue a proclamation to the effect that no one was to give me lodging?"

"No, master, the Taotai does not always issue proclamations," answered the man, with a smile. "If he wishes to do anything quietly he sends out his runners to personally warn the people, and, if necessary, to watch them. Those runners are now the pest of the place, for they find out everything and do no end of mischief: they are the drones which steal the honey from the poor hard-working bees."

"Then do you not run a great risk by harbouring



me beneath your roof?" inquired Montrose, who was desirous of probing the matter to the bottom.

"Of course there is a risk, master," replied the man, "but this cottage is quite hidden from public view, as it stands within a compound which is surrounded by a high wall that screens us; and the ruined temple, of which this building was originally a part, is said to be haunted by the ghost of a priest who once hung himself within its precincts, and in consequence no one ever ventures to come within the enclosure. We are not much afraid to live here, but we always fire off crackers to frighten away any spirits; besides that, we get our cottage almost free of charge. My wife and I are absent from home all day, and my little boy looks after the house. There is one thing I must beg of you to do, master, and that is to see when you are about to leave or enter the compound that no one observes you."

Montrose readily promised to comply with this request, and, as Lao now went outside for the purpose of firing off a string of crackers, he accompanied him, being desirous of seeing the ruined joss-house. The moon was full and the atmosphere so clear that every object was distinctly visible. The courtyard was of considerable dimensions and, besides being covered with long grass and weeds, was almost completely surrounded by umbrageous trees, and on the eastern side of it, and adjoining the cottage, were the ruins of a very ancient building, the quaint roof of which had once been a magnificent specimen of Chinese architecture, and still retained much of its pristine splendour, the top being covered with dragons and other mythological designs. The



steps leading up to the fane were moss-covered and worn down with the tread of many bygone generations of worshippers, while on either side was a stone pedestal upon one of which sat a grim and ferocious-looking beast, fashioned in marble, whose gaping jaws held a red ball.

The roof was broken in many places and through its large rents the moonlight shone, revealing a large chamber in which several mouldering idols kept a lonely vigil. Having left his host to explode crackers, Montrose pursued his way through the deserted halls of the temple. Passing between the row of images, he climbed over a heap of fallen brickwork and had just entered a smaller chamber, when a light, gleaming through a hole in the opposite wall, attracted his attention. He was walking forward when his foot caught against a slab of stone, and he fell to the ground, badly bruising his knee and making a noise. He was rising to his feet, when the light vanished, and he heard footsteps hurrying away.

The place in which he now stood was dark and gloomy, but, happening to have matches in his pocket, he struck a light and hurried forward to an angle of the building, at the side of which the brickwork had fallen or been knocked away, leaving a hole sufficiently large for him to pass through. This he did, and found himself in a small room containing a chipped marble table of ancient workmanship and three rough benches, one of which was overturned. On the north side was a low archway, giving entrance to a dark and damp passage, which he cautiously traversed, holding a lighted match which soon revealed a blank wall and to the left a narrow door

that was standing open. Passing through this he found himself among some high bushes at the back of a small shrine which stood in a weedy, deserted garden containing some banyan trees and an oval-shaped sedgy pond. Here in the olden times the priests of the temple had passed their solitary lives.

Having seen sufficient to satisfy his curiosity he retraced his steps and, passing through the temple, soon gained the courtyard, where he found Lao anxiously awaiting his return. Deeming it advisable not to alarm the poor man, he said nothing about his adventure beyond remarking that it was a strange and interesting ruin; though he felt certain that it was not haunted by the defunct priest, but by some secret society, which used it as a meeting-place or lodge. They now retired to rest, Montrose making a bed for himself by spreading his blankets over a rough pallet which stood in the room allotted for his use; and being thoroughly worn out he was soon fast asleep.



CHAPTER VIII

A SERMON AND A DISCUSSION

The members of the Hung family were not yet stirring, but the servants had commenced their duties. An amah, attired in black cotton clothes, reverently entered the ancestral hall, carrying with her a sheaf of joss-sticks and several tiny cups of tea and bowls of rice on a lacquerware tray. Approaching the oblong-shaped altar upon which were arranged the family tablets and several deities supposed to preside over the chief doors of the house, she placed the sacrificial offerings in front of the "josses" and lighted the sticks, which emitted bluish clouds of fragrant smoke. Having done this, she *kowtowed*, making several obeisances and, leaving the chamber, proceeded to the sleeping apartment occupied by Miss Luh-hwa, which was very plainly furnished, the floor being quite bare except for a strip of matting near the bed, and the white walls merely adorned with a few scrolls.

The woman found that her mistress had just risen from her four-posted wooden bed—which was enclosed by embroidered curtains and a mosquito-net—and was standing near a gauze-



covered window tending some flowers which were growing in a couple of fantastic-looking bowls. She was now only clad in a close-fitting white silk jacket, which showed to advantage her small though faultlessly proportioned figure, and her full though delicately complexioned face, which was partly hidden by the *négligé* of her raven tresses.

A little girl now entered the room with hot water, and, while her mistress performed her ablutions, she and the amah busied themselves about the wardrobe, which comprised a number of pig-skin boxes filled with silk garments. Then Luh-hwa opened her toilet-box, the lid of which was fitted with a movable looking-glass, and which was divided into one or more compartments holding a block of white face chalk, exactly similar in appearance to whitening, but better than the powder used by European ladies; a small pot of hair-gum, a round tin containing a kind of rouge, a number of wood and ivory combs, some pins and a yard of red tape. Hair-brushes are seldom used either by ladies or gentlemen in China; and the former always go bareheaded except in winter when they wear a band, generally ornamented in front with pearl or jadestone, which is passed round the forehead and tied behind, the crown of the head remaining exposed.

Placing the box on the table, Luh-hwa sat down on one of the ebony-wood chairs, and, adjusting the glass so that it reflected her face, leaned back, while the amah proceeded to dress her wealth of black hair which was let down to its fullest length.

The dressing of a Chinese lady's hair is an exceedingly intricate and irksome task that takes



quite an hour, and often much longer, to complete, according to the style of *coiffure* worn; for a northern lady differs in this respect from a southern one, and certain provinces frequently have their own peculiar style of headdress. For instance, some ladies affect large butterfly-wings which extend horizontally from the side of the head, or have a protuberance at the back somewhat similar to the handle of a teapot; and others roll their hair to the front in a wave, or slope it down from the back of the head like the cow-catcher of an American locomotive.

Luh-hwa's *coiffure* was simpler. Her hair was carefully combed until every thread hung straight and unentangled, and then anointed with a kind of palm-oil. This having been done, it was parted across the crown and combed round the ears, a piece of tape being then tied tightly over the head and fastened beneath the chin to keep the front intact while the back was being done. The loose hair was next gathered in behind, and bound round in two places, near the head, with red silk cord, and the bushy part twisted until it became almost as stiff as a rope; then, skilfully winding it into loose coils round her hand, the amah pressed the plait into its place, drawing the bound-up part through, so that it formed a conchoidal loop through which a gold beam, about four inches long, was passed, like a "toggle," and this held the *coiffure* in position. Finally, the tape was untied from the head, and replaced in the box, from which a pot and soft brush were taken. The former contained a peculiar kind of wood shaving which, on being mixed with water, gives a colourless gum that was now plastered over the entire

head-dress, to which it imparted a gloss; and the round plait was finally ornamented with a crescent of fragrant white *mek-li* blossoms.

Good amahs are a constant source of comfort and amusement to their mistresses; for, besides attending to their every want, they generally have an inexhaustible store of interesting gossip and strange tales and legends. Luh-hwa's amah was no exception to the general rule, and her stories and items of news were always eagerly anticipated.

"What do you think, miss," she said, while the hair-dressing was in progress, "the new foreign missionary has arrived, and I believe he is going to preach this morning in the market-place."

"Oh, indeed," said Luh-hwa, "and what sort of a man is he?"

"Well, miss, he is tall and young, and wears his hair short; and he speaks Cantonese."

"Oh, miss," said the small slave-girl, joining in the conversation, "I heard this morning that the foreign-devil is a very bad, wicked, man, and that he only comes here to try and steal small children, because he wants to kill them and make medicine out of their eyes."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Luh-hwa, "who told you that?"

"Well, miss, I was passing near Sin Fah's opium-shop when I heard one of the yamen runners telling some of the people about these bad foreign-devils, and I stopped and listened."

"Those runners are idle good-for-nothings," observed the amah, "and they like making trouble and filling people's heads with evil thoughts. Here, child," she added, addressing the maid, "go



and take Mrs. Hung some warm water, and then go and dust the sitting-room."

The girl left the apartment, and the amah continued talking.

"I don't believe there's any bad in the young foreigner," she said, sympathetically, "and, between you and me, miss, I have given him shelter in my cottage."

"Whatever made you do such an imprudent thing?" inquired Luh-hwa with evident surprise; "you cannot tell, perhaps he is a human demon who works all manner of mischief, and yet pretends to be a saint. Did you ever hear the story of the nice black cat? No? Well, one day a black tom cat arrived at a place where a number of mice lived happily, and instead of chasing them or showing enmity, he closed his eyes and plaintively mewed, making the unsophisticated mice believe that he was praying to Buddha. 'This is evidently a very religious cat, so we need have no fear of him,' they said to one another, and forthwith commenced playing about near the benevolent-looking stranger; but no sooner had they approached within easy reach of his paws, than he suddenly pounced upon them and, taking them unawares, devoured as many as he could catch. Remember the black cat, Mrs. Lao."

"I will, miss," answered the woman, "but Mrs. Ah-choi, who has lived at a place called Shanghai, where there are many foreigners, told me that they are quite harmless and very rich and good-natured. When I was going home last night, I happened to meet the missionary, who looked tired and hungry; so having pity upon him and remembering what Mrs. Ah-choi had said, I took him home to my

husband who agreed to let him stay with us. The young foreigner seems very kind and liberal, and he has a good face ; but I hope, miss, you will not tell anyone that he is staying in my cottage."

"Of course I shall not betray you," said Luh-hwa, kindly ; "but I sincerely hope that no ill will befall you or your good husband. I have never seen any of those *Yin-yun* barbarians," she added, surveying herself in the glass, "but I have heard they are fair-skinned, and wear dark, unsightly garments."

Having completed her toilet, Luh-hwa descended to the sitting-room, where she met her mother and Mrs. Ah-choi, with whom she partook of tea and some light cakes. After that a slave girl handed the elder ladies a silver hubble-bubble pipe which they smoked in turn, the young attendant constantly standing by to fill the small tubular bowl with a pinch of hay-like tobacco, and to light it with a paper spill she held. At ten o'clock they sat down to breakfast, which comprised rice, fish, and vegetables, with which they drank a kind of white wine called *samshu* ; and afterwards the domestic affairs of the household were attended to and the daily pursuits commenced.

Luh-hwa had just returned from a walk in the garden, and was unrolling some embroidery-work she was doing, when her amah told her that the missionary was preaching in the market-place.

Being curious to see a foreigner, she at once repaired to her bedroom and, cautiously approaching the gauze-covered lattice window, peeped through.

Montrose was standing in the centre of the large square which faced the temple, and was surrounded

by a large congregation of men and children who were listening open-mouthed to all he said; but now and again a contemptuous jeer or vile epithet was flung at him from some rough-looking characters who moved among the crowd and seemed very busy telling the people something about him, for they repeatedly shook their fingers or pointed in his direction.

"See those yamen runners, miss," said the amah to Luh-hwa, whose gaze was intently fixed upon the preacher; "they are stirring up bad feeling against the poor young man."

"He looks very brave and handsome," observed Luh-hwa, with a sigh; "I hope no ill will happen to him, for I daresay he has a father and mother in his far-away country across the sea."

"No, miss," said the woman, "he told me last night that he is quite alone in this world, and does not fear death because his god Yesu is with him."

"Alone in the world," repeated Luh-hwa thoughtfully, "and yet so young and handsome; surely someone must care for him."

Suddenly a rough-looking man, standing at the foot of the steps leading to the temple, picked up a piece of rotten sugar-cane and threw it at Montrose, striking him in the face. He bit his lips and continued to preach, taking no notice of the insult; but, although one or two elderly men cried shame upon the offender, some of the riff-raff seemed highly pleased and laughed loud and long.

"*Hai-ya!*" roared a dirty-looking soldier from the yâmen, "that's the way to serve those baby-stealing foreign-devils!"

"Yes," shouted a companion of his, "he's got

his evil eyes on two little boys over there. Ho, there, you children!" he added, with a coarse oath, "run home to your mother, or that foreign-devil will make medicine out of your eyes."

"Oh, dear," said Luh-hwa, nervously, "I am sure those wicked wretches will do harm to him. But how brave and patient he is!"

"Yes, miss," replied the worthy amah, "as I said before, I don't believe there is any harm in him."

The quieter people among the young missionary's audience now began to move away as the rowdy element was increasing; so, finding that it was no use trying to quell the disturbance, Montrose brought his discourse to a close, and left the market-place, making his way to another part of the city.

Some of the rabble followed him for some distance, hooting and throwing stones; but, at length, seeing that he took no notice, and was not likely to afford them more amusement by again preaching, they gradually dwindled away until he found himself alone, save for one venerable man who had paid great attention to his sermon and had persistently followed after him, at the same time using his best endeavours to pacify the mob.

"I must thank you, sir," said Montrose, pausing and addressing the old gentleman, "for the kind influence you have exerted in my behalf, and for the patient attention with which you listened to what I said."

"I appreciated your discourse," replied the Chinaman, who was none other than Mr. Wong Ah-chih, "and I should much like to have a quiet

talk with you, if you will accompany me to my humble abode which is close at hand."

Montrose willingly assented, and the stranger soon ushered him into the small house with which the reader is already acquainted, having been there with our mutual friend, Cheng, when he called to pay his New Year respects to his tutor.

In accordance with the rules of Chinese etiquette, Mr. Wong made inquiries respecting his visitor's name, age, income, and pedigree, and, having replied to similar questions, led the way to his small reception-room, and, asking Montrose to be seated, drew a chair near him and continued the conversation.

"It is many long years since I have seen or spoken to an Englishman," he said with a benevolent smile, "and I was delighted to hear of your arrival in Lien, though I am heartily ashamed of the tardy reception accorded you by my countrymen here."

"I am convinced, sir," said Montrose, "that the natives of this place are not altogether responsible for the inhospitable treatment I have received, but that it emanates from another quarter."

"You are right in your conviction," said Mr. Wong, lowering his voice. "The Taotai of this city means to secretly resist any foreign influence being brought to bear upon the people he governs; and, from what I noticed this morning, the underlings of his numerous retinue were particularly active in inciting the people to violence by circulating among them the most atrocious stories concerning you and the missionary fraternity in general, with the result that the uneducated classes of the populace, whose credulity is easily worked upon, believed a great deal of what was

told them, and began to manifest considerable hostility towards you."

"Well, I shall not give in," said Montrose, with calm determination, "for China must be aroused from her lethargy, and brought to a sense of her iniquitous paganism."

"Pardon me, sir," said Mr. Wong, in a tone of mild rebuke, "but the kindest and noblest mission you could perform to my unfortunate country-people would be to try and arouse the sympathy of the Western Powers in their behalf, by bringing those Powers to a sense of the injustice done to China and the Chinese by their present rulers, the Manchu-Tartars, and by those who support their corrupt administration. Yes, sir," continued the old man, with great fervour, "lift from their bleeding backs the crushing burden of bondage and extortion, and make them once more a free people, before you try to widen and fructify their minds, which are now cramped and distorted by tyranny and enforced ignorance. It is no use expecting fruit from blighted trees, or sowing seed in ground which has not been prepared for it. Pull up the weeds and plough the ground, and the seeds will flourish; remove from the throne of China its usurpers—the avaricious task-masters who forbid and strenuously withhold knowledge from the poor subjects they rob, govern and exterminate—and China will join hands with the West, and hold up her head once more."

"You do not seem to realise the importance of Christianity," said Montrose, taking from his pocket a small Bible and opening it. "Saint Paul, the Apostle of our Lord Jesus Christ, says: 'Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him and

given Him a name which is above every name : that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in Heaven, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.' ”

“That is good,” said Mr. Wong, smiling complacently, “and in our book, the *Chung Wung*, Tsu Tze, the disciple of Confucius, says of that Great Master : ‘His fame overspreads the Middle Kingdom and extends to all barbarous tribes. Wherever ships and carriages reach, wherever the strength of man penetrates; wherever the heavens overshadow and the earth sustains; wherever the sun and moon shine; wherever frosts and dews fall, all who have blood and breath unfeignedly honour and love him.’ ”

“But Tsu Tze’s prophecy was never fulfilled, and never will be,” said Montrose ; “whereas the prophetic words of Saint Paul have come to pass, for the Christian religion has been carried to the ends of the earth.”

“I grant that, sir,” said Mr. Wong. “But, with all due respect, I beg to express my belief that it is not so much the inspired influence of your faith as the power which backs and propagates it; for I maintain that the teachings of our two great sages, Confucius and Mencius, are as pure and exalting as those contained in your Bible. All religions are bright stars, some appearing brighter than others, but each lighting and revealing the Heavenward way, and belonging to the great spiritual constellation. If you please to follow and revere the teachings of one master, surely we have a right to follow those of another who has lived and died among the homely scenes that

daily meet our eyes ; who has endeared himself to us by his exemplary life and doctrines.

"It is not fair," he continued, "to charge against Confucianism those evils which have not emanated from its teachings, but have sprung up and established themselves in contradiction to its true spirit. Were I to visit your country and to lay to Christianity, as the result of its doctrines, the social evils which I observed, your country-people would be rightly indignant at so hasty and indiscriminate a conclusion.

"Confucianism and Christianity," he added, "are unanimous in regarding man as endowed with a moral nature, and as being responsible for his own salvation; and both Mencius and St. Paul say that all men may become Yaous and Shuns, that is, perfect men. Christ says, 'Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven'; and Mencius says, 'The great man is he who does not lose his child-heart,' and that, 'the great aim of learning is nothing else than to seek the lost heart.'"

"You seem acquainted with the Bible," said Montrose, wondering at the old man's information.

Mr. Wong smiled and, going to a drawer, brought out a thick, time-coloured volume written in Chinese.

"This is the only remaining souvenir I possess of the great Christian rebellion of the Taipings," he said, opening the book and reminiscently turning its well-thumbed pages. "This translation of the Bible, known as the 'Book of Declaration of the Divine Will, made during the Heavenly Father's descent in the Spirit upon Earth,' and two other works, 'The Book of Religious Precepts of the

Taiping Dynasty,' and the 'Book of Celestial Decrees,' were printed under the directions of the Ecclesiastical Court of the Taiping Ministry, between the years 1855 and 1861, and were circulated free of charge throughout their dominions.

"Thousands upon thousands of these volumes were intentionally burned when the Manchu-Tartars, assisted by the English, took Soochow and Nankin, and annihilated the Taipings; and ever since then I have wondered why England—after crushing the very seeds of Christianity which her missionaries had sown, and which had brought forth such an abundant harvest of good fruit—again sent ministers of religion out to the Far East. The Taipings were carrying the Gospel of Christ throughout the length and breadth of the Middle Kingdom, and always welcomed into their midst, and claimed relationship with, the *Wachoong-tae*, or 'brethren from across the sea,' as fellow-worshippers of Yesu; and yet these Christian people were ruthlessly exterminated and sacrificed because they rebelled against the Imperialists, who then owed England a large indemnity, and because they refused to allow the importation into, or use of opium in, their domains, thus threatening to ruin England's immense trade in that pernicious life-corrupting drug. But believe me, sir, the Taipings would have more than compensated your country for that loss by encouraging commercial enterprise, and by throwing open the country and all its ports to English trade.

"Of course," he added, "the Manchu-Tartars promised to make various concessions in favour of your country, in consideration of her support, but

no sooner was the rebellion suppressed, than they resolutely turned their back upon England, and have ever since maintained towards her an attitude of haughty indifference, being naturally antagonistic to foreign influence or anything which tends to enlighten and give freedom to the vanquished and over-taxed people of China."

"But," said Montrose, "English missionaries ought not to be blamed for the acts of English politicians."

"Quite true, sir," answered Mr. Wong, "but my people naturally prefer to keep to their own religion rather than adopt that of a country which upholds her oppressors. They are not likely to soon forget how the Taiping Christians were treated."

"You say," observed Montrose, "that your people prefer to keep to their own religion. Do you regard idolatry as a religion?"

"Idolatry has in it the fundamental principles of religion," replied Mr. Wong, "inasmuch as idols represent human virtues, being emblematical of saintly beings who have passed heavenward, and they encourage reverence for all that is great and glorious. Of course, I am alluding to Chinese idols which represent the deified saints and heroes associated with Chinese history, and sometimes with its mythology.

"The bee," he added, "does not extract its honey from one particular kind of flower, but from a variety of flowers; and virtue is not perfected by making nice distinctions between the different forms of worship, but by culling the sweetness from them all, each religion having in it some of the principles which combine to constitute godliness."

Tea was now brought in, and the conversation

turned upon the affairs of the city; and after a time Montrose rose to depart.

"Mr. Wong," he said, impulsively grasping the aged scholar's hand and pressing it warmly, "I have learned much from this conversation with you, and I trust it is not the last time I shall enjoy the pleasure of your company. I must now be going, as I intend holding a meeting during the afternoon in one of the small outlying villages, a mile or two from Lien."

The good old gentleman expressed the great satisfaction it had given him to once again meet a "foreign-brother," and accompanied Montrose some distance down the street to the main thoroughfare.

"Remember, Mr. Montrose," he said at parting, "the Mandarins of China are your sworn foes, for they not only regard you missionaries as the pioneers of Christianity, but as the forerunners of commercial enterprise and the harbingers of reform and enlightenment—hence their secret hatred of, and interference with, your benevolent works. You are supposed to pave the way for Western intercourse, and if the freedom and good government of the West became known to the bond-people of the Far East, they would realise their position more acutely and, rising to a man, shake off the yoke of tyranny; and the Mandarin would no longer be able to levy his unjust taxes and live in princely opulence on the ignorance and credulous stupidity of his servile subjects. So he teaches them, through the medium of his mercenary retainers, to regard Western ingenuity as witchcraft, and to strenuously oppose the doctrines of your enterprising missionaries and expel them from the land."

CHAPTER IX

A WARNING IGNORED AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

After leaving Mr. Wong, Montrose went into a tea-shop and had a cup of the refreshing beverage which "cheers but not inebriates," and some light rice-cakes which were very palatable. The Chinese are a most abstemious race, and their tea-shops take the place of our public-houses, and are frequented by all classes who meet there to smoke and chat; indeed, so temperate are these people that it would be quite remarkable to see an intoxicated Chinaman outdoors; and they enjoy their homely brew of lightly-fired leaves with as much gusto as a German does a bottle of good Rhine wine.

The "Celestials" are really the only inhabitants of the globe who know how to make tea properly. In the first place, their *cha*, as it is called, is always of the best "chop," the leaves being of a light brown colour, and the beverage, when made, of a delicate amber tint. The leaves are put into a cup, and boiling water is poured over them; then a lid, which can also be used as a saucer, is placed upon the cup and the tea allowed to draw for a few minutes, when it is sipped slowly.

While in the tea-shop, Montrose got into conversation with a very respectable middle-aged man who seemed well informed and deeply versed in the lore of the land. The discourse turned upon the virtues of the beverage they were drinking, and the Chinaman, on being asked how his countrymen first discovered the plant, related with much gravity and conviction the following legend:—

“During the thirteenth year of the reign of the devout monarch Wu Tai (A.D. 518), the first Chinese patriarch of the Buddhist hierarchy, named Dharma, came to China for the purpose of preaching his religion to the inhabitants. He is said to have been a man of exemplary piety, and, in order to chasten himself and subdue his passions, he suffered all manner of hardships, subsisting upon common field herbs, and passing whole nights in the open air, braving the elements and keeping an unbroken vigil while contemplating the godly essence. He attained to a high state of moral perfection, but after many watchful penances he became so exhausted that he fell into a deep sleep and had a most pleasant dream, in which he seemed to be drinking the nectar of the gods. When he awoke the next morning and found that he had broken his sacred pledge, he was deeply grieved, and, in order to prevent himself from again slumbering, he cut off both his eyelids—those offending members having caused his deviation from duty—and cast them upon the ground. In a few days Dharma happened to return to the same place, and to his surprise he found that each eyelid had grown into a shrub. Plucking some of the leaves, he ate them, and was

astonished to find that they made him feel hearty and joyful, and filled him with new vigour, enabling him to pursue his pious meditations with renewed energy and vigilance. He at once informed his followers of this wonderful plant, and its virtues soon became widely known and appreciated, with the result that tea is now consumed all over the world."

Montrose met with a very friendly reception from the people of the small village in which he preached that afternoon; but he was wise enough not to tire them on first acquaintance with a long sermon. Afterwards the headman of the place took him to his house and gave him refreshment, at the same time evincing great interest in the "true religion," as he called it, of which he had heard much in his younger days when the Taiping rebels demolished the Chinese temples, destroyed the images, and preached the gospel of Christ throughout the land.

While resting himself in the headman's abode, Montrose heard the loud beating of gongs and braying of horns, and, on asking the reason of this, his host invited him to go with him and see the domestic dragon-spirit of a certain house reinstated in office.

Before proceeding I must inform the reader that every mountain and hill in China is supposed to be inhabited by numerous powerful dragon-spirits, to which are entrusted the guardianship of the houses in that neighbourhood. When a new domicile is to be erected a geomancer is employed to find a site favourable to the dragon and *feng-shui* (wind and water) influences; and, when the structure is complete and a shrine has been prepared for the

spirit whose protection is to be invoked, the tutelary monster is installed in its office with pompous formality, and is worshipped at stated periods. At the expiration of one hundred years, should the house be still standing and inhabited, the protecting dragon-spirit is supposed to need reanimation and propitiation; and it was to witness the third and last part of an important ceremony of this kind—which had already occupied two days—that the missionary was now invited.

Montrose was conducted to the outskirts of the village where he observed a number of people approaching from a low range of hills situated about two miles to the northward. They were making a great noise, and all manner of musical and unmusical instruments were being strained to the utmost to produce as much sound as possible, irrespective of harmony; so that the din was almost distracting, particularly to the sensitive ear of a European. Nevertheless, Montrose went to meet the procession, which comprised most of the chief people of the neighbourhood, some of whom carried banners, and he and his host accompanied it into the village, where a halt was made before a red-brick building of some dimensions, which had been erected a century ago. Entering by the front door, the people approached a time-worn niche built in the wall of the house, and gathered around it, while the tenants of the place, assisted by a wizard who chanted incantations in an unknown tongue, made sacrificial offerings to the dragon-spirit. Wine, tea, and cakes were placed in the shrine, and these proceedings were accompanied by the discharge of crackers, the burning of silver paper, the loud braying of horns, and the

beating of gongs; and then the wizard, in order to terminate the ceremony and prove his supernatural powers, thrust a knife down his throat without injuring himself, immersed his arms in boiling *samshu*, and finally—amid murmurs of awe and wonderment—triumphantly walked through a blazing fire of dry sticks and charcoal.

The dragon warden having been fully reinstated in his post of trust, the people turned their attention upon Montrose, who took the opportunity of distributing among them a number of religious tracts which were eagerly accepted. To his new friend, the headman, he presented a translation of the Bible which was received with every manifestation of reverence and gratification; and, when they parted, the old gentleman called his two young sons and bade them pay homage to the stranger, before whom they *kowtowed* with great solemnity, showing him every mark of respect and goodwill.

After spending a most useful and pleasant afternoon among the peaceful inhabitants of that small country village, Montrose journeyed back to Lien in the cool of evening. The way led among well-cultivated fields and past small farms nestling among bright-hued foliage; and along the narrow path many people were passing homeward, some bearing merchandise from the neighbouring city, and others coming from the surrounding lands where they were accustomed to work. As in all other parts of the "Middle Kingdom," Montrose particularly noticed the great amount of respect paid to old age and honest labour. The path leading from the village to the city was very narrow, and was traversed by all sorts and conditions of

people, rich and poor, young and old, but even the wealthiest civilians respectfully stood aside—relinquishing the right of way—for the aged peasant or burdened coolie to pass on without hindrance. Not so the officials, for the retainers of the meanest mandarin would indiscriminately push aside and chastise any who dared to obtrude themselves upon their path.

Our zealous friend became more than usually thoughtful as he pursued his way among these rural scenes, for he was beginning to learn that the people of China were not the poor, contemptible beings he had been led to suppose them, but a highly ingenious and civilized race. Everywhere he travelled his observant eye met with the same sure indications of general thrift and temperance, and, although those whom he had come to convert were designated "heathens," he was obliged to admit that in many respects they could well bear comparison with the great Western nations to whom their real character was so lamentably unknown: for the men were honourable and the women virtuous. In these people he saw all the traits of character out of which a great and mighty nation might have been built. They were endowed with extraordinary patience, perseverance and filial piety, and were frugal, abstemious, and industrious; but, on the other hand—owing to their enforced ignorance—they were narrow-minded and superstitious, and the tyranny and extortion of the mandarins had rendered them sly, timid and suspicious when in the company of strangers. It was fast dawning upon him that the rulers of China were its curse and destruction. Instead of the country being

opened out and improved by good roads and railways, its vast revenues were swallowed up and divided among the Government officers, whose name was legion, whose power was unlimited, and whose coffers seemed bottomless. In consequence the means of communication between the various cities and provinces were of the most primitive and unaccommodating kind, so that three-fourths of that vast population were, from birth to death, practically imprisoned within the small area of a few miles, being bereft of all intercourse with the outside world and totally ignorant of what was taking place around them, except for what they might casually hear from stray travellers.

Montrose arrived home at eight o'clock in the evening, and found that Lao Chin had prepared for him a tasty meal of boiled rice and fowl, flavoured with currants and spices, to which he did ample justice, being hungry as well as fatigued. The good man had heard of the insults he had met with that morning while preaching in the market-place, and earnestly besought and cautioned him not to venture there again just at present, since it was rumoured abroad that violence was meditated against him by some of the populace, who had been incited by the evil stories the yamen runners had so sedulously circulated against him. But Montrose scorned the very idea of showing apprehension or shirking the sacred duty he felt bound by honour to perform; and the very fact of there being danger and opposition strengthened rather than diminished his bold-spirited resolution to again address the people of Lien at the appointed time and place.

He was about to retire to rest, being much fatigued after his long walk, when Mrs. Lao entered and at once handed him a letter enclosed in an ornamented oblong-shaped envelope. The epistle ran thus:—

“TO HIS FOREIGN EXCELLENCY, MUN-TRO-TSZE.

“Think me not presumptuous in addressing you, for I take the liberty of doing so in order to implore you not to again preach in the market-place, since I have heard that certain bad men wish to cause your destruction. I have looked upon your face, which is good; I have heard your words, which are wise—very wise for one so young; and, although it gives me pleasure to listen to your earnest discourse, and to behold your patient courage in the midst of dangers and difficulties, I would sooner not see you again than know that you suffered or died. You are alone and far from your country, and you are among strangers and enemies; therefore pay heed to my warning, for it is given in good faith, and is not an idle one. Ponder over my words; and may the gods be with you and defend you from all harm. Farewell.—A FRIEND.”

Wondering who could have sent the anonymous letter, which was written in small, delicately-formed characters, Montrose interrogated Mrs. Lao; but the good woman only smiled and shook her head, saying that she had promised not to reveal the writer. Then she proceeded to point out the dangers to which he would expose himself if he persisted in again preaching in the market-place; but he remained obdurate, replying that if it was God's will that he should die on the morrow, no precaution of his could possibly prevent it: so he would take his chance. Then, thanking his kind friends for their solicitude in his behalf, he retired to his small chamber, and throwing himself down upon his rough pallet soon fell into a deep sleep, which was tranquillised by



the thought that there were, at least, some people who wished him well.

Perhaps the reader has already guessed as to the person from whom the innominate letter in question emanated, and will be more shocked than surprised to learn that it was from the shy and innocent Miss Luh-hwa. However, such was the case, for—in spite of her prejudices, and contrary to her anticipations—the interesting young foreigner had unconsciously made a deep impression on her susceptible mind; and his bravery, good looks, and, above all, loneliness, had appealed strongly to her generous and romantic nature. Moreover, his impassioned discourse, his earnest manner, and his manly bearing had all combined to draw her towards him; and seeing and hearing of the dangers that threatened him, she determined to dissuade him from again exposing himself to the wrath and violence of an excited and ignorant populace. To effect this she was obliged to take Mrs. Lao, her amah, into her confidence, which she knew the worthy woman would never betray; and it was with blushing cheeks and trembling hand that she wrote the aforesaid letter and entrusted it to this faithful attendant.

When the latter had gone home for the night, leaving her young mistress alone, Luh-hwa sank into a seat and covered her burning face with her hands, for she was afraid and ashamed of what she had done, since she had risked her honour and reputation, and had violated the strict moral code of her country in a manner which would have brought upon her serious disgrace and punishment had the missive been discovered by

any of her family. For no Chinese female is allowed to commune or correspond with a person of the opposite sex, unless he be her husband—particularly with one of an alien race—nor is she ever allowed to speak to or see the man to whom she is betrothed until the nuptial cords have been tied and her fate irrevocably sealed for better or for worse. Therefore, it is not to be wondered at that Luh-hwa's inbred sense of maidenly propriety was shocked, nor that she was surprised at her own temerity. She was certainly abashed at what she had done, at the same time she did not regret it, for her charitable heart was warmed towards the young stranger, and she felt for him that deep sympathy which is so often the first symptom of that incurable malady of the heart known as *love*.

That night Luh-hwa did not sleep as well as usual, and was up early next morning to learn from her faithful amah the result of her warning to the missionary. Mrs. Lao repeated what Montrose had said after reading the letter; and the young girl's heart sank within her when she heard that he was still determined to preach in the market-place.

When dressed for the day, Luh-hwa dismissed her attendants, and, lighting some joss-sticks upon the little altar in her room, knelt down and implored the gods to preserve the life of the good and brave foreigner. Then, descending to the lower apartments, she accompanied her mother and Ah-choi to the Ancestral Hall to make the customary oblations, after which they sat down to breakfast.

At half-past ten Luh-hwa returned to her

upstair room, and on going to the window noticed that a large crowd of people had gathered in the market where business seemed at a standstill. She was soon joined by Mrs. Lao, who pointed out to her a number of villainous-looking yamen runners, who moved about among the assembly, whispering a word here and there where they thought it would best further their evil purpose. Then suddenly a deep, ominous murmur burst from the mob below, and the missionary was seen approaching along the road.

Luh-hwa turned deathly pale and, mechanically grasping her companion's arm, watched Montrose as he advanced, alone and apparently unconcerned, to the centre of the market-place and, stopping there, calmly confronted the motley assemblage upon whom silence had again fallen: for they seemed taken aback at his boldness, and awed by his commanding aspect.

In spite of his rashness and his defiance of her warning, Luh-hwa now admired the young Englishman all the more for having faced his foes; and, as he drew himself up and his clear, dauntless voice fell upon her ear, she forgot everything except that he was speaking; and, leaning forward until her face touched the gauze covering of the window, she marked his every word and gesture with heartfelt interest.

He had not been preaching very long when a shout of *tow-fan-quai-an* (eye stealing foreign-devil) was raised by some roughs standing on the outer edge of the congregation. This cry was quickly taken up by other throats, and at the same time pieces of garbage picked from the ground were hurled at Montrose, some striking his face,

though without doing him harm. He did not pay the least heed to these insults, but continued his sermon, exhorting the people to abandon idolatry and to look Heavenward to the one true God for help and consolation.

Pointing towards the temple, he said: "What good can those wooden images possibly do for you? They crumble to pieces, and in a few years have to be replaced by others, which in turn rot and vanish. Whereas the invisible God of Heaven and earth lives on for ever, regulating the movements of all things, even of the sun, moon, and stars, and lovingly watching every living creature, from the Emperor to the meanest beggar; and the beasts of the field and the birds of the air are not too insignificant for his notice, for he created them, and they are kept beneath his watchful eye."

Luh-hwa was listening to these words and nervously watching their effect upon the congregation, which was growing more tumultuous than ever; and just as Montrose again raised his hand and pointed in the direction of the temple, another fierce cry burst forth, and someone threw a large stone which struck him upon his face, cutting him severely and causing the blood to flow freely.

This seemed the signal for a general assault, and loud, blood-curdling yells rent the air, altogether drowning the voice of the young preacher. But Luh-hwa did not witness all; she saw the infuriated mob surging around that tall, dauntless form; she saw the missiles flying and the quick blows descending, and then, with a piercing cry of anguish, she staggered back and, clutching the arm of her attendant, dropped senseless to the ground.



Montrose defended himself gallantly, and every time his strong arm shot out one of his assailants rolled in the dust. But the odds were overwhelming, and the cowardly wretches who led the attack were armed with heavy sticks and bamboos with which they rained blows upon his head; and at last he fell backward bleeding and unconscious.

Most of the mob now dispersed, and the actual perpetrators of this dastardly deed moved away in various directions, being a little frightened at what they had done; but a few of the most vicious of them were about to further mutilate the apparently lifeless body of their victim when Cheng—who had just returned from his tutor's house—rushed upon them and, standing over the prostrate form, pelted them with the bricks and stones which lay around, at the same time loudly upbraiding them for their vile and cowardly behaviour to an innocent and defenceless stranger.

Cheng had great influence in the city, and, as before stated, was highly respected for his learning, so his interference was as effectual as it was timely, and the guilty scoundrels at once desisted from further violence and slunk away.

The young man had done all that he dare do for the present beyond having the body covered with a linen sheet; but Mrs. Lao ran out and begged him to lend her one of his father's old sedan chairs, that she might have the poor foreigner conveyed to his lodging. Being of a kindly disposition, Cheng at once complied with this request and ordered two of his own chair-coolies to fetch the conveyance, into which Montrose was gently lifted.

The market-place was now quite deserted, so,

directly the wounded man had been placed in the chair, the blinds were drawn down and the front screen put up, and, without attracting the least attention, he was safely borne to his humble lodging, to which he was accompanied by Mrs. Lao, who gave the chair-coolies a liberal gratuity, out of her own small hoard, when she dismissed them.

Having laid Montrose upon his bed, this kind-hearted soul proceeded to bathe his temples with fresh spring-water, and to carefully attend to his injuries, which were serious though, fortunately, not fatal. Besides several contusions about the body, he had three ugly scalp wounds, a deep cut at the side of the head, and the left arm badly fractured.

Like many Chinese women, Mrs. Lao was well acquainted with the healing properties of certain herbs; so she hastened away to procure from a neighbouring apothecary the proper remedies. On returning she found that her patient had recovered consciousness and was inclined to ask questions; but she urged upon him the necessity of his keeping perfectly quiet and refraining from all conversation until his wounds had healed; as any irritation would inflame them and endanger his life.

He lay back submissively, feeling truly thankful that he had fallen under the care of such a good Samaritan; but towards evening he became restless and delirious, and it was apparent that a malignant fever had set in. Having administered a soothing draught of *un-see-cha**, Mrs. Lao and her husband by turns watched the sufferer, who

* A dark-coloured beverage made from five different medicines, which is boiled and drunk while hot. *Un-see-cha* is sold in small square cakes, and is always administered in fever cases.—AUTHOR.



spent a bad night; but as morning approached his sleep seemed less troubled and his breathing more regular; so these kind-hearted guardians went about their respective duties, leaving their young son to watch by the bedside.

By the time her amah arrived Luh-hwa was up and dressed and impatiently awaiting news of the unfortunate Montrose. She had fully prepared herself for the worst, having made up her mind that he was dead; and when she heard that he was alive, though in a critical condition, her pent-up feelings found vent in tears. While life remained there was hope; but she was wise enough to know that his recovery must, to a great extent, depend upon the careful nursing he received; and, when she learned that he was left under the charge of a young boy, her anxiety became more poignant than ever.

Her amah could not be spared from the house, for, besides attending to her, she had other duties to perform; moreover Luh-hwa was moved by a womanly instinct to personally supervise the wounded man's treatment, and to do all in her power to alleviate his sufferings. These motives, which were doubtless prompted by her fast-awakening affection for the luckless stranger, again weighed heavily against her inborn prejudices and maidenly scruples. Nevertheless, she at first resolved to only obtain a glimpse of the patient, in order to satisfy herself that he was comfortable and well cared for; and then she could better judge how she might best serve him. She was quite alive to the danger she would incur by doing such a rash thing as to secretly visit a person of the opposite sex, particularly a foreigner;

but passion like hers knows not fear nor fickleness, and had her very life been at stake she would have found a means of again beholding the man she loved.

That very day Luh-hwa formed and put into execution her plan for seeing Montrose. She was in the habit of taking a ride in her chair every afternoon, and sometimes in the forenoon, and of being accompanied by a couple of amahs who walked beside the conveyance; but on this occasion, and many subsequent ones, she contrived to dispense with the services of one woman, and was only attended by Mrs. Lao, in whom she had unbounded confidence.

On arriving at the ruined temple that adjoined the humble abode in which Montrose lay, Luh-hwa alighted from her carriage and gave instructions that the chair-coolies should wait outside the courtyard, which they did. Then she and her amah softly approached the cottage, the door of which was standing open so that the sufferer might have plenty of air; and Luh-hwa's heart beat violently as she took her companion's hand and allowed the good woman to lead her quietly into the sick-room, which was a small apartment with bare, white-washed walls and earthen floor, and but one narrow window protected by wooden bars.

Approaching the bed on tip-toe, Luh-hwa stood beside it, mutely and sympathetically gazing upon the still form and striking features of the stricken man; and then she laid her small hand caressingly upon his brow, and, finding it was hot and feverish, opened her fan and, with timid tenderness, wafted a cooling, zephyr-like air upon his face, lightly

ruffling his disordered hair, which was dyed in places with blood.

The placid resignation depicted on the young missionary's countenance more than ever convinced Luh-hwa that he was noble-hearted and pure-minded, and his utter helplessness still further kindled the fire of love which was destined to blaze and burn to the core of her guileless heart. She did not dare to think about the future, which was a hopeless blank, for she could never be his; but a great desire to save and serve him took possession of her, and her simple convictions soon suggested to her the proper course to pursue, if she would prolong the life which had suddenly become as a part of her own being.

On returning to her father's house Luh-hwa at once taxed her resources to the utmost to supply Montrose with all the comforts she considered essential and conducive to his recovery. These things Mrs. Lao took with her—besides a long rigmarole of instructions—when she went home that evening.

The fact of having someone to take care of and secretly cherish made Luh-hwa's solitary life seem sweeter; and she would steal away into any quiet corner and indulge in thoughts and dreams which she dare not release from her breast. And when the day was done, and she retired to rest, she would lie awake until the house was hushed and midnight came, and then she would get up and, lighting a sheaf of joss-sticks upon her small altar, pray the gods to take from her life a full measure of years and give them to the brave young foreigner who lay nigh unto death. There, in the silence of her chamber, this fair girl would unburden her trustful

heart, freely offering the precious years of her existence in the solemn belief that they would be taken from her and given to the man she loved.

There was something supremely beautiful and unselfish in her simple innocence and generosity, and, if ever a prayer was recorded on high, God must have listened to hers.

In recognisance of this solemn compact, and in accordance with the customs of her country, she had a small tablet of pure gold made, and upon it was inscribed the date and conditions of her covenant. This tablet she took with her to the temple, and, after repeating her promise and making many offerings and obeisances, hung it up by a chain of gold upon the neck of the goddess Tin-how, whose breast was covered with a number of similar relics, placed there by poor and rich alike, and for the same charitable purpose, self-sacrifice being one of the virtues most esteemed and practised in the "Middle Kingdom." Then she retraced her steps homeward, sincerely believing and rejoicing that a portion of her days would go to prolong the life of her wounded hero.

To return to Montrose, the fever raged within him with unabating virulence for several days, and he would certainly have died had it not been for the cooling medicines which were constantly given him, and the careful attention he received.

One warm, sunshiny morning he awoke to consciousness, but lay for some hours in a half dreamy state of tranquillity, being alive to his surroundings, but too fatigued to move or speak. He noticed, however, that his bed was soft and luxuriously equipped, that his head rested upon a richly embroidered cushion, and that the small

window, through which the sun was wont to dart its fiercest rays, was covered with a bamboo blind and amber-coloured curtains which subdued the light in the room; while the floor was carpeted with matting, and here and there pots and vases of choice flowers gave a touch of homeliness to his poor abode, and pleasantly relieved its severe simplicity.

While vaguely wondering what kind soul could have wrought this gratifying change, and what deft hands could have so tastefully arranged the flowers, he observed a beautiful young girl enter the room.

For a moment she stood with clasped hands and anxious face upon the threshold, eagerly looking towards him; but, as his eyes were almost closed, she fancied that he was still insensible, and glided forward to his side. He felt the cool, light touch of her hand upon his brow, yet did not speak; for a feeling of lassitude and happiness held him mute and motionless; and then a soft, fragrant air, which was raised by her fan, wafted him back to the borderland of dreams, where he lingered for hours in a seeming trance, while the youthful form hovered near.

Next day he lay for a long while quietly watching this fair angel of mercy and wondering whether it was all a dream; and one day, after being asleep during the forenoon, he suddenly awoke to find a small hand clasped in his, and to see this strange young girl seated beside the bed. Turning his head, he gazed in her face and was gratefully raising her hand to his lips when she started up, stood trembling before him for a moment, and then fled from his presence, and did not come back for two long days.

Being curious to know who this beneficent stranger could be, Montrose interrogated Mrs. Lao; but the good woman only smiled, shook her head, and replied that it was a secret she had promised not to divulge, and advised him not to be too inquisitive, or the bird might fly away and never again return. So he watched and wondered; and, when this light of his life came, he followed her movements with half-closed eyes, and remained silent fearing lest he should scare her away.

As he gradually grew stronger, the visits of this good genius became less frequent; and one afternoon, on awaking from a sound sleep, he was told that she had been to see him for the last time. He received this news with manly reserve and without comment, but an indescribable sensation of loneliness and despondency oppressed him: for the "still small voice of gratitude" had entered into his heart and aroused feelings which had long slumbered; and he now realised how much he had learned to care for and revere the gentle, winsome creature who had stood beside him when on the brink of death, and who had exerted her whole strength to draw him back from its yawning precipice.

The coming and going of this benevolent being had been so perplexingly mysterious, so sad and so sudden, that he knew not what to think. He could only wonder and regret—wonder what could have drawn her towards him, who she could be, and why he might never commune with her or behold her again after that day.

It would have been suicidal to have continued preaching in Lien, so Montrose wisely determined to leave the city and return to Canton, where

he would report his disgraceful treatment to the British Consul, whose duty it would be to report the matter to the authorities at Peking, and have the Taotai of Lien severely reprimanded: for, unless something was done to ensure due respect being paid to foreign missionaries, it would soon be unsafe for them to travel in the interior of China.

At last he was sufficiently convalescent to proceed on his journey, and early one calm, sunshiny morning he took leave of his kind protectors, and did not forget to recompense them, as far as was possible, for their kindness and hospitality. He had not seen anything more of the gentle girl who had done so much to lighten the burden of his affliction and restore him to health, but he had heard that she was deeply interested in his welfare, and that her Christian name was Luh-hwa; and as his worthy host brought his pony to the door, and he was about to take leave of him and his wife, he drew from his finger a curiously-wrought amethyst ring, which was an old family relic, and, calling Mrs. Lao aside, instructed her to give it to Luh-hwa as a slight token of his esteem and gratitude, and to ask her to wear it as a keepsake. This the good woman promised to do; so, again thanking her and her husband for their kind and charitable deeds, he mounted and rode away through the deserted streets towards the south gate of the city.



CHAPTER X

CHENG PREPARES TO LEAVE HOME

Cheng pursued his studies with unremitting zeal and energy, being determined to gain a high place and power in the land, and thus gladden the hearts of, and raise to honourable distinction, the fond parents who had so generously lavished their money upon him. The fair Miss Ah Leen, whose maidenly beauty had already won his tender regard, did not often reward his patient vigils by appearing upon the city walls in her chair; and when she did so it was not always to smile upon him: for her amahs were watchful, which obliged her to be most discreet, and her father was a harsh, inquisitive man, who, having his own interests nearest at heart, had made up his mind that she should either become one of the Emperor's minor wives, or be espoused to a rich Tartar official, preferably the former since his own position would thereby be strengthened. So, after months had passed and the time had arrived for Cheng to leave his native place for Canton, the two young people were still practically strangers to one another.

Since the advent of the new Taotai, Shun Ming,



the affairs of Lien had not prospered, for the rich had been unmercifully squeezed, and the poor had, in consequence, suffered proportionately, work being scarce, wages low, and the gaol crowded; but His Excellency grew richer and fatter, and his coffers fuller and heavier, and great was his satisfaction: indeed, so well was he faring that he had increased his retinue.

Probably the man who had suffered most at the hands of this avaricious tyrant was Mr. Hung Fong, whose purse had been constantly drained under many and various pretexts which it would have been dangerous to question from the very fact of their being so iniquitous; but he patiently submitted to this fleecing process and seldom complained, being able by judicious investments to realise sufficient money to meet all present demands, whether legal or illegal, without encroaching upon his capital. Although these trials were ageing him fast, and he began to anticipate the near future with fear and distrust, all his hopes were centred in his son-and-heir, whose dutiful and affectionate conduct and ambitious aims soothed and brightened his life; and, being justly proud and fond of him, and wishing to foster his independent spirit, he determined that whatever happened Cheng should have sufficient money to place him beyond the possibility of need and facilitate the completion of his arduous studies.

It was arranged that our young friend should take his departure from home on the eighth day of the fifth moon, as that was an auspicious date; and on the morning previous his father called him into the garden, and, taking his arm, led him

along a winding path which soon brought them to a secluded spot where there was some rock-work.

"My son, we cannot tell what the future may bring forth," said Mr. Hung, pausing and holding aside some creepers, "so I have been laying up a little store for you, in case of any emergency; for I fear me that dark days are ahead, and I do not intend you to suffer for want of sufficient money to complete your education and give you a start in life."

Looking around to see that no other person was near, he carefully removed a couple of bricks, revealing a square aperture from which he took a small oaken box, which was secured by a steel bolt and two miniature locks. Producing a key, he unlocked this casket, and, sliding back the bolt, lifted the lid, exposing to Cheng's wondering gaze a large assortment of the most precious stones—large egg-like pearls, the purest jadestone bangles and necklaces, each worth thousands of taels, and the most perfect unset rubies and sapphires.

Cheng did not speak for a moment or two, but, with unfeigned astonishment, examined the contents of the box.

"My dear father," he at length said, "what do I want with these riches?"

"You do not require them now, my son," replied Mr. Hung, regarding him with paternal affection, "but a time may come when you will need them much, and then you will find these gems safer and handier to carry than silver; for the amount of money represented here would fill several chests, which would be dangerous and burdensome to carry about with you. Whereas you can easily stow this small box away among

your baggage, or, by dividing the contents, carry them upon your person; and, when short of money, all you have to do is to select one of these stones or bangles and convert it into current coin sufficient to last you a considerable time. For of late I have gone to much trouble to procure, from the Indian and Persian traders who have from time to time visited this city, the most precious and marketable gems, and have carefully hoarded them up for you."

"But, father," said Cheng, "when I return home from Canton, you can supply me, as heretofore, with all I require, and we shall again live together. To use the Great Master's words: 'The good man is concerned about his ignorance rather than about his poverty.' And this applies to all people; and, since worldly possessions do not induce intellectual activity, I am too well off already."

Mr. Hung stifled a sigh and, closing the casket, regarded his son with steadfast eyes.

"The future is wisely hidden from our view," he said with prophetic solemnity. "I do not grow younger, and my burdens are not lessened. But my heart is strong in the trust and hope reposed in you, and it will give me consolation, during your absence, to know that, in spite of any calamity which might befall me, this hidden treasure will be of service to you at some future period."

"May the gods bless you and be with you, dear father, and preserve you to honour and gladden my return," said Cheng, helping his worthy parent to put back the casket in its hiding-place.

"But surely," he added, "Shun, Taotai, will now leave you in peace: he has dipped his hands

deep into your treasure, and has borne away more than most men would have had the conscience to bear."

"Speak less loud, my son, for these are troublous times," answered Mr. Hung, continuing. "When the Tartar taipan calls I must—if I would preserve my place and people—respond with alacrity. It is a true saying that 'the relationship between superiors and inferiors, or officials and civilians, is similar to that between wind and grass: the grass must bend when the wind blows upon it.' However, I will not lament; while you are still with me—while I have life, and you to guard and venerate my name—my heart shall rejoice and my hopes be buoyant."

"Father, you are too good to me!" said Cheng with passionate earnestness, falling to his knees and bowing his head to the ground. "All that learning could achieve would not make me worthy of your love, your generosity; and Heaven will only sanction my enthronement in your heart when virtue has prepared me for the place."

"May your gaze ever be fixed Heavenward, my child, and your steps lead thereto," said Mr. Hung, gently assisting Cheng to rise. "Heaven has bestowed upon me a worthy son, a son who will reflect credit upon my name; and, as our Great Sage wisely says, 'the father secretes for the son, and the son secretes for the father.' So speak not of my kindness, dear Cheng: I have only done my duty."

Mr. Hung now handed the key of the casket to Cheng, who deposited it in one of the pockets of his embroidered belt; and then, having carefully replaced the creepers, they returned indoors, the

young student going to his room to superintend the packing of his valise. The rest of the day was spent in preparations for the journey and in paying farewell visits to kinsfolk and friends; for Cheng was about to enter upon a most important epoch of his career, and this would be the first time he had left home for any long period.

In order that the reader may have some idea of the significance of the step about to be taken by our clever and ambitious young friend, I will endeavour to describe the system of competitive examination upon which the foundations of the "Celestial Empire" may be said to rest, and have rested for numberless years; for long before the Pyramids were raised, this most ancient and ingenious civilisation was flourishing in peaceful and prosperous magnificence, self-contained, invulnerable and independent; and, in dress, manners and beliefs, the Chinaman of to-day is the exact counterpart of his remote ancestor. Over thirty centuries ago this vast and remote empire had discovered and adopted a mighty system of government which has outlived, and will continue to outlive, all others: a system by which political preferment can only be attained through moral and intellectual excellence; and, while wars have raged around her—while other nations have come into existence, flourished with meteoric brilliancy, and crumbled to extinction, often riven asunder by internal disorder—China has surely, serenely, sensibly and successfully maintained herself intact, clinging with fond reverence to the old and wise principles of her constitution, which have borne her safely past rock and shoal since the days of Yao and Shun.

China, with its three hundred and seventy millions of inhabitants, is governed by a body of literati who have risen, stage by stage—some from lowly stations to the very foot of the throne—through long and diligent training in Confucian schools and institutions, followed by intellectual tournaments or examinations, which prepare the most able and gifted competitors in the land for the responsible positions they afterwards hold.

In every city, town and village there is one examination hall and several schools, the latter varying in number according to the population ; so that, by paying a few cents a month, the poorest children receive a good education, and may in time rise to high positions in the land. There is no class system in these preparatory academies, but each boy pursues his way independently ; so that apt scholars are not hindered by dull ones, while the latter are not hurried along too quickly for their intellectual capacity. At certain seasons the best behaved and cleverest boys are singled out and placed on the list of candidates for degrees ; and then these are tried and tested to ascertain whether they are fit and eligible to strive for political honours, much importance being attached to their moral character and parentage, each aspirant having to show that through three successive generations his pedigree has been unsullied. If this investigation proves satisfactory to the student he forthwith commences his forward course by going up twice every three years to the *Hien*, or chief town of his country, and twice to the *Foo*, or departmental city where he is examined by certain Government commissioners expressly appointed for this purpose.

However, no degree is conferred at these preliminary exercises, which only serve to enhance the reputation of the scholar; but afterwards he is permitted to compete twice every three years at the *Yuen* examination which is conducted by a high official who visits the departmental city. Out of several thousand scholars only one in fifty can take the first degree of *Sui-tsai* or "Budding Genius," equivalent in some respects to our B.A., though far more difficult to attain.

As I have said before, Hung Fong Cheng had already gained this distinction, which renders the possessor eligible to enter the triennial examination for the second degree, like our M.A., held simultaneously at the provincial capitals. In this severe contest, which continues for nine days, during the whole of which time the student is not allowed to leave his cell, only sixty competitors, out of some ten or fifteen thousand, can possibly "leap the dragon-gate," and become *Chow-jin* or "Promoted Men." But those who take the prize are made much of, and, in the following spring, can again enter the arena, this time going to Peking where there is a long and mighty contest, between the *élite* of learning from all the provinces, for the *Tsen-tsze* or "Noted Scholar," similar to our L.L.D., only infinitely more important and requiring greater mental effort.

The few fortunate victors in this competition now enter the Imperial lists to be examined in person by the Emperor, who carefully sifts the already well-sorted and refined material before him, selecting eighteen of the most illustrious graduates from whom he picks a tripos comprising first, second and third wranglers, who are appointed to

the "Hanlin," or Imperial Academy, to superintend State affairs. These men are the heroes of the empire—the pride of the nation—the flower of the land—and are royally rewarded and entertained by their sovereign, who sends express messengers throughout the length and breadth of the land to circulate the names of these *Chuang-yuen*, or "Laureates."

This is the excellent system of educational advancement to official posts, which shows how strongly China is endowed with political economy and administrative genius. Thus the humble student becomes a component part of the great conservative organisation which forms the bulwark of the land; and thus he becomes the promoter of a great and sapient scheme which permeates and influences all ambitious minds, welding them together and perpetuating the nation by moulding its destiny. And, by the time the student has traversed the long length of the jealously guarded and keenly contested highway to fame and fortune, he has grown to sober and dignified manhood: and only through years of diligent labour, moral rectitude and continuous perseverance has he gained the coveted goal of wealth and position—for, financially, his credit is now unlimited, even the Emperor being proud to honour his cheques for any sum up to a million ounces of silver—and at last proudly stands before his monarch and his peers, a finished scholar, indoctrinated in all learning, and fitted to rule his people with wisdom, and to uphold the honour and exclusiveness of the exalted "Dragon Throne."

It is not the scheme of government which makes China such an unhappy country, but it is the



was quite grieved to part with his tutor, who also seemed very downcast and despondent, and expressed a fear that they would never meet again.

"During the journey, and after crossing the Poyang Lake, Lee stopped for the night at Yao-tchou, where he found shelter in a Buddhist monastery. Being fatigued, he retired to rest early, but about midnight he fancied he heard the sound of the door being quietly opened, and, on sitting up in bed, was surprised to see his old tutor enter the room. The latter approached the bed and, holding the curtains aside, laid his hand upon Lee's shoulder, saying: 'My dear friend, you will be deeply grieved to hear that I have just bid adieu to the world,* and as I could not bear to quit it without seeing you again, my spirit has come to bid you farewell.' Whereupon Lee became very nervous and excited, and was about to spring from his bed, when the ghost said: 'Do not be in the least afraid, for I would not harm you; I merely came to see you, because of my affection for you, and because I have a parting request to make.' His looks and manner quite reassured the student, who expressed his willingness to do anything he could for the old man. 'May Heaven reward you, dear friend,' answered the ghost. 'I have a wife who is very poor, and it will set my mind at rest if you will see that she is supplied with a few piculs of rice. I have also a book of essays which I have just completed and, being desirous of making my name illustrious, I shall ever feel grateful if you will have it printed and published.

* Such phrases as the above are generally made use of by the Chinese, who very seldom apply the verb "to die."

"Lee promised to fulfil these requests, but seeing his master preparing to depart, begged him to remain with him a little longer. Then the ghost came closer to the bedside and, having shed tears of emotion, continued conversing with his late pupil; but after a time his whole appearance began to change. His limbs seemed to become rigid, his eyes gleamed and stared, seeming to sink deeper into their sockets, and he ceased speaking. Lee became very alarmed and cried out, 'I will do all you wish, sir, but pray leave me now.' But the ghost made no sign or movement, and still glared at him; so the young man became panic-stricken with fear, and, jumping from his couch, rushed out of the room. The dead man turned and followed, causing him to flee in wild terror out of the monastery and through the city. But Lee was quite unable to evade or outrun his spectral pursuer, who kept close at his heels, traversing the ground with swift and noiseless steps. At length the hunted student arrived at the city wall, over the battlements of which he scrambled in mad haste and, losing his footing, fell to the ground where he lay insensible for some hours. Next morning he was found by some people who happened to pass that way, and they made him swallow some ginger which restored him to consciousness.

"Being unable to account for his strange experiences of the previous night, he sent a messenger back to Nanchang to make inquiries respecting his turtor; and in a few days he learned that the poor man had passed into the land of shadows on the very night and some hours before the time that his ghost had appeared to



him in Yao-tchou. On receiving this sad news the student at once returned to Nanchang and carried out the wishes of his deceased master, whose wife was provided with food and lodging, and whose book of essays was published ; and from that time forward Lee Ah Ming was singularly successful in all he undertook, and quickly rose to power and position."

"A strange story, indeed," observed Mr. Wong, adding with a smile, "but in case my spirit should at any time enter the land of shadows, I hope no one supposes that I shall likewise harrass and pursue my pupil.

"Make your mind easy, Ah-tin," he said, turning to Cheng, "I have no wife to feed and no essays to be published.

"Speaking of ghosts," he continued, "the late Provincial Chancellor, Tsoi-Poeng-hao, had a remarkable adventure when he was a young man. Near the north gate of Hangchow, where he was then living, there was a deserted house reputed to be haunted by a *kwei* (demon); and, as no one would live there, the windows were boarded up and the doors secured. Being tempted by the lowness of the rent, and in spite of many friendly warnings, Tsoi took the house on a long lease; but, when he had prepared it, his family became frightened and refused to reside there. He was very annoyed at this and determined to prove that the place was habitable by sleeping there himself.

"When night came he repaired to the haunted house, but did not quite like retiring to rest until he had tested the truth of the many disquieting rumours which people had dinned into his ears;

so, going to his sleeping apartment, he placed a lighted candle upon the table and, seating himself in a chair, began to read.

"An hour or two passed without event, and Tsoi was becoming drowsy when a faint rushing sound, like a gust of wind, caused him to start and look towards the door, which he had left open. To his surprise and consternation he saw a beautiful woman enter the room, wearing a red scarf around her neck and carrying two ropes which she fastened to staples in the ceiling and then tied a noose in each. Now, smiling and bowing to Tsoi, she prepared to hang herself, at the same time holding out the other rope and telling him to follow her example. But, instead of obeying her, he carelessly lifted his foot and placed it in the noose. Whereupon the woman cried out in a wailing voice, saying: 'You are wrong not to do what I wish. Follow my instructions and you will be happy.' Tsoi only laughed and replied, 'With all due deference to you, fair lady, I beg to express my humble opinion that the fault lies on your side, and has evidently done so for a considerable time, or you would not be in this unhappy plight.' Then the woman wept bitterly and, unfastening the ropes, knelt at his feet, and having asked his pardon suddenly vanished, and was seen no more. The house was never again haunted, and during Tsoi's residence there he was always in good health and prosperous circumstances."

At the conclusion of this story tea, cakes, bonbons and wine were handed round, and the conversation was carried on until quite a late hour, even the ladies, especially Mrs. Ah-choi,

the second wife, enlivening the evening with quaint and mysterious tales and anecdotes. Luh-hwa did not talk much, but sat pensively listening to all that was said, and eagerly drinking in every word that fell from the lips of her brother, whom she regarded with devoted admiration; and now and again she would smother a sigh as her thoughts wandered to that lone, handsome stranger whom she might never hope to see again. Then, at Cheng's request, she took her *pipa* and played some sweet airs which interpreted her feelings more eloquently than words could have done.

Shortly before midnight the ladies retired to their apartments; and, as Mr. Hung and his son were going to worship together at the temple, the kind-hearted old tutor expressed a desire to accompany them there, because he wished to also offer up prayers on behalf of his pupil; so the three gentlemen, followed by the man, Ah Sam, left the house, and, crossing the deserted marketplace, entered the venerable fane.

The interior was dimly lighted and the air heavy with the fumes of incense to which the new arrivals contributed by lighting and placing fresh joss-sticks in the various receptacles for them. Ah Sam had brought the usual sacrificial offerings of tea, rice and cakes which were now placed upon the altar of the chief deity. Then Cheng knelt between his father and tutor, and all three earnestly prayed for some time, prostrating themselves and bowing until their heads touched the stone flooring.

It was an impressive sight: the ancient and solitary temple, the youthful form with its devout

inspired face, and on either hand the elderly parent and age-bent mentor—the old prayerfully consigning the young to the care of an all-merciful Providence; while the stalwart, faithful servant reverently knelt behind them and joined in the midnight prayer.

There, side by side in the sacred gloom, amidst the shades of departed forefathers, the young man and his world-worn companions invoked the aid and protection of the gods; and at length a priest slowly approached the worshippers and, raising his outstretched hands above Cheng, solemnly pronounced a farewell benediction.

As they rose to depart, Cheng's attention was arrested by a young girl whom he at once recognised as Miss Shun Ah Leen. She had been praying at an adjacent shrine, and, just when he caught sight of her, was rising to her feet; and, as she did so, their eyes met, and for a moment both stood motionless. Cheng inwardly wondered whether she knew that he was going away, and had come there to pray for him, since that was the usual time for these particular ceremonies; and, when he noted the expression of profound sympathy and dejection on her face, he concluded that all was known to her, and, acting upon the impulse of the moment, clasped his hands and made several low obeisances. She inclined her head in confusion and, with a last lingering glance, hurried away.

Mr. Hung had noticed, with much surprise, the behaviour of his son, and at once inquired who the young lady was.

With truthful candour Cheng gave her name and, briefly relating the circumstances under which

they had from time to time seen one another, confessed his regard for her. His father's brow clouded at the mention of the lady's name, but he did not interrupt his son's explanation. At an early stage of his infatuation Cheng had made a confidante of Mr. Wong, so the latter knew all about the matter and did not now venture upon any remark.

"I am sorry," said Mr. Hung, when he had heard the story, "that the lady in question is closely related to the Taotai; for the barrier between the two families is great, and is increasing daily. Moreover," he added, lowering his voice, "Shun Ming is a bad man. Dragons give birth to dragons, and tigers breed tigers, and if you make a pet of a tiger's cub you can only expect to be bitten."

Cheng paid respectful attention to what his father said, but did not make any rejoinder. While leaving the temple he descried three miserably-clad beggars lying upon the terrace beneath the shelter of the overhanging eaves of the finely-decorated roof; so he distributed largess among them, and their expressions of gratitude were auguries of good. And, as he looked back upon the recumbent forms of those poor wretches, he could not help feeling proud of his nation, and even proud that those men were countrymen of his; for, although the doors of the temple were open all night, and there were valuable tablets and ornaments upon the idols and altars, those penniless outcasts would have starved and died where they lay, beneath the friendly shelter of that holy house, sooner than steal those treasures to relieve their want. There was more

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manliness and true religion in those three beggars than in half the priestly parasites who scorn the "heathen's" faith.

Having seen Mr. Wong safely to the door of his humble abode, Mr. Hung and his son returned home and at once retired to rest to recuperate themselves for the morrow.



CHAPTER XI

WAYSIDE HOSPITALITY

Next morning, which was the eighth day, the Hung family was astir early, even the ladies being dressed in silk attire and nervously flitting about at a time when they were usually only beginning to emerge from slumbers sweet.

At six o'clock the outer gate-keeper announced the arrival of Mr. Wong A-chih, who was met at the second gate by Cheng, who at once conducted him to the ancestral hall, where the household had now congregated for the solemn leave-taking ceremony. In the adjacent courtyard two horses were harnessed and waiting, both animals being partially laden with luggage and in charge of coolies, while three sedan-chairs were in readiness for transport purposes.

Cheng gave his tutor a warm and yet reverential welcome and led him to where his father was praying at the ancestral shrine bearing the family tablets; and they knelt there together, the young man in the middle of the elder ones. Behind them were the ladies and their attendants separated by a screen from the male servants, who occupied the sides of the apartment, two of whom were

engaged outside in firing off strings of crackers in order that any malevolent *shen* or *kwei** might be scared away from the neighbourhood.

Having besought the aid and protection of gods and ancestors in favour of those about to depart from them, the assembly rose and, with the exception of the two elders and Cheng, who remained behind, left the hall and took up similar positions outside where they remained standing.

After saying a final prayer, Mr. Hung took his son's hand and, accompanied by Mr. Wong, led him out of the sacred chamber. The ladies, and afterwards the servants, now came forward, one at a time, and took leave of the young heir, elaborate salutations and compliments being exchanged in approved "Celestial" style. Poor Luh-hwa seemed almost too moved to bear this ceremonious ordeal, and Cheng appeared equally affected, so that their parting was of the most touching description.

Then solemnly making a last, low obeisance, Cheng left the womenfolk, and, with his father and Mr. Wong, passed into the adjacent courtyard where their chairs were awaiting them. Entering these, they were quickly borne away, followed by the male servants on foot and the *máfoos*† leading the horses. As the little procession left the house it was considerably augmented by other conveyances and pedestrians, representing relatives, friends, headmen of the city, and other interested well-wishers of all classes who were desirous of witnessing and doing honour to the young student's departure. For Cheng was one of the

* *Shen* means a spirit, and *kwei* a demon. † Groom or coachman.



most juvenile and most promising graduates; and many of those who now followed his chair still had the red and yellow posters, which proclaimed him winner of the first degree, exposed upon the outer walls of their houses.

After passing through the south gate the procession skirted the dried-up moat for some distance and then, winding round to the south-west, came to a standstill upon some rising ground. They had now arrived at the appointed parting place, so the chairs were lowered and the occupants alighted.

Cheng looked round with pleasure, not unmixed with pride, upon the many fellow citizens who had come to see him off; and his grave, scholarly face relaxed into a warm smile of welcome. Then complimentary speeches were made, followed by much bowing and cracker-firing, and at length the time came for our youthful hero to take leave of his father and tutor, both of whom were in a state of great agitation and were fanning themselves vigorously.

Kneeling before each of them, he received their final blessing and their assistance to rise; and then, amidst thundering volleys of crackers, parting acclamations and words of encouragement he mounted his pony and rode slowly away to the southward, followed by Ah Sam.

Soon afterwards the crowd dispersed and returned into the city; but Mr. Hung and his aged companion stood upon a grassy knoll and eagerly strained their eyes in the direction of the two horsemen; and as Cheng turned and gazed long and lingeringly back upon the ancient walls of his native place, strong emotions caused the tears to

course down his face, for many were the hopes, thoughts and memories which crowded into his mind, centring around those grey battlements and those two motionless forms which he still saw in the dim distance standing together in the bright sunshine of early morning.

It was a splendid day, and the scenery and weather were inspiring to our travellers. All around lay well-cultivated undulating country with bright patches of virescent colouring which changed from golden green to emerald and malachite; while here and there the quaint roof of some joss-house or homestead peeped from among clusters of graceful bamboos and palms, enhancing and relieving the peaceful landscape. And some miles ahead to the southward a fine pagoda thrust its gourd-shaped spire into the blue heavens, majestically crowning a small eminence which was clothed with fine trees whose thick foliage was bedecked by many a lofty cocoa-nut plant laden with large, ripe fruit.

The Chinese have a very amusing legend as to the origination of the cocoa-nut. In one of the bygone dynasties Prince Leu Yeh had a serious quarrel with another royal personage named Suh, who, being an evil-minded and vindictive man, sent some of his servants to assassinate Leu Yeh, whose head was then tied to the topmost branch of a tree and left there. In time it became transformed into a fruit which was called Yeh-wang-tou or "Prince Yeh's head"; and the cocoa-nut is still known in China by that name. Moreover, bowls made out of the shell of the fruit are much prized, as the Chinese firmly believe that if any poison were put into vessels of this kind, the latter would



at once break or cause the liquid to boil and bubble, thus revealing the danger.*

As Cheng and his servant rode slowly along they did not for some time speak to one another, for the scenery through which they were passing and the recent events of the morning encouraged silent thoughtfulness. Now and again the drowsy songs of husbandmen, or the sharp cries of boys driving water-buffaloes could be heard; and at times lumbering, squeaking wheelbarrows carrying passengers or merchandise passed on their way to Lien.

Both master and servant were armed with antique horse-pistols, which were carefully concealed upon their persons, as civilians are not supposed to carry arms; and, in place of holsters, two oval baskets, containing pots full of hot tea, dangled from the saddle-bows: for a Chinaman never travels without his tea-pot; and his wool-padded basket, in which the latter reposes, as in a nest, keeps the beverage hot for hours.

After the travellers had been riding leisurely for about two hours, the ground swelled upward to the pagoda, and the narrow path they were following led through park-like grounds until a fine avenue of banyan and chestnut trees was reached. Soon afterwards they dismounted before the tower-like obelisk, which was evidently of great antiquity, since long grass and bushes grew upon the galleries, and fragments of crumbling stonework lay scattered around its base.

* Bowls scooped from the horn of the rhinoceros are also supposed to make known the presence of poison by sweating, and are therefore much valued by the northern Chinese, who probably learned the superstition from the Mongols. These rhinoceros bowls are sometimes used for wine at great banquets.

The upper stories of pagodas are usually reached by means of a spiral staircase, either built in the thickness of the wall or around the interior of the shaft; but sometimes there is no mode of ascent, in which case communication between the various stages can only be established by placing a strong plank diagonally across from a lower window or landing to a higher one, and then climbing up and repeating the operation until the summit is reached. The staircases are usually narrow and without railings or protection of any sort, and the outer galleries seldom have a balustrade; while often enough the steps are so arranged that on reaching each story you must pass through a window and make your way round the narrow ledge outside to an entrance on the opposite side where you ascend another flight of steps, this being very dangerous work, and only accomplished by facing the wall, keeping cool, and clinging with outspread arms and hands to the trunk of the edifice—a mode of ascent not to be attempted by any but those blessed with the strongest nerves.

Instead of entering the pagoda, Cheng lighted a few joss-sticks he had with him and, placing them in a small crevice in the wall, *kowtowed* several times and then proceeded to the other side of the edifice near which stood a comfortable-looking farm-house embosomed among foliage. As he traversed a narrow tree-shaded path and approached the entrance to this rustic retreat, closely followed by Ah Sam leading the ponies, an elderly man appeared at the doorway. He was clad in holiday attire and wore a rich blue silk jacket with a yellow undergarment of the same material; and, directly he caught sight of our

young friend, a smile of gratification overspread his benevolent face.

"Welcome, my dear Cheng; have you had your rice?" he said, coming forward and exchanging profuse salutations. "This is indeed a propitious day, and yours an equally propitious first-foot; for it is my infant son's birthday—he was one year old at six o'clock this morning. So you must be my guest until to-morrow, and join in our festivities."

The gentleman who gave Cheng this warm greeting was a Mr. Foy Lan-ho, a well-to-do farmer who had known Mr. Hung and his family for many years, but had only seen them occasionally, the distance between their respective abodes being considerable. But Cheng's rising reputation as a scholar had reached his ears, and had greatly strengthened his feelings of respect and friendship for the family; and the very fact of the young student's step being the first to cross the threshold of his door on that auspicious day seemed to augur well for the little son and heir, whose destiny might be most favourably influenced by the mere presence of one so modest and learned; therefore the good farmer was eager to extend his liberal hospitality to the travellers, even Ah Sam being looked upon as a good genius because of his honourable responsibility.

Cheng willingly accepted the kind invitation, and—while his servant took the horses round to the back—was shown into the reception-room which was plainly but well furnished, the chairs and tables being of fantastically carved ebony inlaid with marble, the floor tiled and carpeted with straw matting bearing curious designs, and the white-washed walls decorated with a few long scrolls.

Inviting Cheng to take the left-hand seat on the *kang*, and seating himself on his right, Mr. Foi inquired most kindly after his old friend the merchant, and was much interested in all news from the city. He had already heard of the misery and dissatisfaction caused by Shun Ming's appointment to the Governorship of Lien, and sympathised deeply with Mr. Hung in his heavy losses through this rapacious official's extortionate demands.

While they were conversing, a servant brought in tea and cakes; so, wishing to show his marked esteem for his guest, Mr. Foi rose from his seat, and, taking the cup in both hands, presented it to him. According to etiquette, Cheng rose simultaneously and, with polished courtesy, received the cup, handling it in exactly the same manner as his host, and only again seating himself when the former had done so.

After a time, several visitors began to arrive, most of them being farmers from the surrounding districts; and each one brought with him a small packet carefully wrapped up in red paper.

Before meeting any strangers, Cheng begged that he might be allowed to make himself presentable, and was shown into Mr. Foi's private apartment where he donned his best clothes.

When all the guests had arrived, the usual refreshment was served, and then the host invited everybody to accompany him to the ancestral chamber. As a mark of respect, and according to the custom of the country, where learning is highly venerated, Mr. Foi persisted that Cheng should lead the way with him into the adjacent



room where the family tablets* were kept. On entering, they approached the altar where they were met by the chief wife, who held in her arms the precious babe in whose honour the present ceremony was to be performed, and who was clothed from head to foot in red silk.

The good woman, who was sumptuously attired, seemed very proud of her small boy, though painfully nervous, not being accustomed to male society beyond that of her husband; and, when the guests had taken the places assigned to them, she sat down before a table which stood in front of the sacred tablets, and was covered with red lacquer. Upon this were arranged a variety of articles, each one representing a profession or trade. These were all placed within easy reach of the innocent babe, who was now held over the table by the mother whose arms trembled as she did so. The company drew closer and closer, anxiously watching the tiny hands as they spasmodically moved about; while the father eagerly craned his neck forward and, motioning Cheng to come nearer the child, waited in breathless suspense to see which of the models his little son would touch first, because the child's future calling in life would be thus indicated.

* The origin of the Ancestral Tablet is traced to the Prince of Tsin, in the Chou dynasty (B.C. 350). The Prince had a faithful servant named Kai Tze-choi who, while on a long march, saved his royal master from starvation by cutting some flesh from his own thigh and having it served to him. The poor fellow was unable through his self-inflicted wound to proceed further, and, unknown to his companions, he remained behind, taking shelter in a wood which was soon afterwards burned. Directly he was missed the Prince sent back some soldiers to find him; but they only discovered his charred remains. So the grateful monarch caused a tablet to be erected to Kai's shades, and had incense burned to him at stated periods.

The chubby face of the babe suddenly lighted up with a smile, the little lips commenced cooing with delight, and the small hands began beating about in dangerous proximity to the precious articles that were supposed to indicate his future sphere of life. In another moment one of the small hands descended with a swoop and grasped a bright mandarin button; and a cry of exultation involuntarily burst from the lips of the proud parents, and, being caught up by those around, ended in loud exclamations of delight. For little Foi Ah-lao would surely become a scholar, and would probably rise to high estate, and one day wear the coveted mandarin-hat. So no wonder the simple farmer and his faithful spouse were overjoyed at the wise selection of their child.

Strings of crackers were now exploded, and while this deafening *feu de joie* was going on, Mr. and Mrs. Foi prostrated themselves in front of the ancestral tablets, before which they placed sweet-smelling joss-sticks and fruit, and burned silver-paper fashioned like ingots or shoes of silver.

The birth of the first male child is an important event in a Chinese family, and is the occasion of much rejoicing. Immediately after the babe's entry into the world the happy father takes a large piece of vermilion-coloured paper upon which he inscribes eight characters placed in couples, each pair representing the day, hour, month and year of the child's nativity. This important document is handed to a geomancer, who draws from it the boy's horoscope or book of fate, known as his *pat-tsze*, by the aid of which the parents regulate and determine the affairs and treatment of the child. The next step is to go to the temple and propitiate



the goddess *Kai-laen*, or "Mother," to whom divers offerings are made, and whose interest in the baby-boy's future welfare is humbly solicited.

On the morning of the third day after birth, the child's head is washed with a mixture of water, soap and spices in the presence of a small idol personating the deity *Kai-laen*; and then a red silk cord is tied round the little fellow's neck, while his hands are bound together with a similar ligament in order to keep those guiltless members from picking and stealing in after years.

When night comes, and the baby is put to rest, a pair of his father's trousers are suspended from the bed-post, and attached to them is a notice exhorting all spirits that might harbour ill intentions against the helpless infant to kindly vent their spleen upon the owner of the pants.

On the thirty-first day of the first month after the child's birth, the *moon-yat* ceremony is performed by the parents, who are assisted by their relations and friends, all of whom bring useful presents of various kinds. The company having assembled in the ancestral hall, the child is seated upon a stool in front of the family tablets, before which incense is burned, and his head is washed with water in which are placed two boiled duck-eggs, some leaves of the *wong-pi* tree, some ginger, and a few ancient copper cash. Then the most aged barber that can be found proceeds to shave the small boy's head until it is as bald as a pebble, when the eggs are rolled round his little pate, upon which a local patriarch now lays his hand, blessing the child and praying that it may be favoured with a long and prosperous life.

That night a sword made of gilded coins is hung upon the child's bed, this charm being held in high repute as a preservative against evil influences; and sometimes the father collects from different people a hundred cash with which he buys a necklace clasped in front by a small lock, this ornament being also prized as a safeguard against sickness and other ills that flesh is heir to.

Directly the little fellow begins to toddle, his feet are encased in red "kitten-shoes" with a cat's head worked upon each toe, these being supposed to impart to the wearer a sure, cat-like tread. Then follows the first birthday ceremony which has already been described; and from that time forth the little "Son of Han" is carefully trained by his mother to be pious, honest and reverent to his elders; and so he gradually develops into a grave and sensible chip of the old block.

Before Mrs. Foi withdrew to her apartments with her infant son, each guest handed to her a present for the child. All were useful gifts, such as soft red caps with a small hole at the back for the little pigtail to go through when it had grown, summer and winter clothing, diminutive shoes, ivory chop-sticks, etc., while Cheng, who had no such appropriate articles with him, gave the child a well-bound pocket edition of the "Analects of Confucius" for future instruction, and it was greatly prized by both parents.

After that, a gong sounded, and Mr. Foi invited the company to dinner. Laying his hand gently upon Cheng's arm, as they led the way into another room, he smiled and said: "I am indeed glad that fate directed your steps hither to-day;

for I was most anxious that my son should make a promising selection, and I am sure your presence exercised a beneficial influence over him."

Cheng smiled and bowed, feeling much complimented and highly satisfied with the results of little Ah-lao's choice.

"It reminds me, sir," he said, "of an incident I once read in the second chapter of the 'Dream of the Red Chamber' where, on Pao-you's first birthday, his father, who was most anxious that the child should eventually become a distinguished scholar, spread before him numerous articles, promising to make a prognostication of his future career from the first emblem he touched; but, to the poor man's sorrow and disgust, Pao-you seized upon a box of face-powder and, on being tried again, took up some rouge and hairpins."*

"Yes, I remember reading that episode," said Mr. Foy, with a triumphant smile; "and I can imagine what a parent must feel when the first-born male child selects an ill-omened and contemptible symbol."

Of course no ladies were present at the banquet, and the guests were seated at a square *bá-sin-toi*, or "eight-fairy" table; and during the meal a troupe of itinerant actors, who had rigged up a platform to serve as a stage in the garden and close to the open folding-doors, performed a somewhat bawdy five-act drama called "The Willow Lute."

Each guest was provided with a two-pronged

* This would indicate that the child would eventually become a barber or actor; and barbers, play-actors, and executioners are the only people debarred from attending the examinations and competing for political honours.

fork, a short, porcelain spoon, a pair of chop-sticks, a wine-cup and some small pieces of paper with which to clean these utensils, fresh ones not being provided. There were sixteen saucers upon the board, placed in rows of four, and containing fresh and dried fruits, pickled cabbage, candied fruits, almonds and preserved eggs; and in the centre was a large bowl of boiled rice. The following table will give some idea of the courses served :—

Sharks' fins and crab sauce.
Birds-nest soup.
Ham and chicken broth with sea slugs.
Mushrooms and pigeon-eggs.
Wild-duck and boiled cabbage.
Duck and cabbage stewed.
Fried pork and rice.
Bamboo shoots and chicken.
Stewed shell-fish.
Pork and beans stewed.
Stewed mushrooms and lily-roots.
Chicken fried in oil.
Boiled fish and soy.
Salt fish and rice.

At intervals the host served all the guests with warm wine† and then, according to custom, gave the command to drink, when each person drained his cup to the dregs and inverted it to show that he had done so. While being served with wine, it is considered proper and polite to bow and place the left hand on the side of the vessel.

Not being sufficiently habituated to the hard-drinking prevalent at dinner parties, and being obliged by etiquette to respond to each call, or toast, Cheng had recourse to the customary

† The wine usually consumed at dinner-parties is like Madeira in colour and slightly so in taste; but it is not strong, and those accustomed to it can drink large quantities without being intoxicated.

alternative of imbibing by proxy, and obtained the valuable services of Ah Sam who, nothing loth, stood beside his chair and manfully emptied pint after pint of rare good *samshu* down his capacious throat and, while inverting the cup, smacked his lips with a huge relish.

After dinner the company split up into small parties, and dominoes, card-playing and pipe-smoking became the order of the afternoon, even Cheng joining in a rubber of native whist, and money soon began to change hands; for gambling is the chief fancy and failing of Chinamen, both great and small, and our young friend was no exception to the rule.

Thus the time passed quickly and pleasantly, and in the evening there was another feast, enlivened by a clever exhibition of tumbling and conjuring. After that, those of the guests who lived some distance away, took their departure; but others, who were Mr. Foi's near neighbours, stayed until an early hour of the morning enjoying themselves in true "Celestial" style.

In the garden numerous coloured lanterns of all sizes and shapes—some with moving figures of man and beast*—were hung among the trees, giving a pleasing and fairy-like effect to the sylvan scene; and small tables and chairs, the former laden with refreshments and sweetmeats, were placed upon the grass; and the gentlemen congregated together, smoking, conversing, and telling those marvellous tales and legends in which the

* The moving principle in these lamps, which are wonderfully effective and lifelike, is generally a light bamboo or cardboard wheel turned by the heat-draft of the lamp and connected with the various figures by means of thin strings.

wonder-loving Asiatic takes such a childish delight.

Mr. Foi commenced by relating the old local tradition of the "Cup Traveller," a noted Buddhist priest named Pei Tou, who lived in the thirteenth century and was wont to roam about over the Kwangtung province. This good man once stopped the night at a rich farmer's house, and he saw therein a beautiful golden image of the Goddess of the Moon, which so tempted him that he stole it and fled. Directly the theft was noticed chase was given by a party of horsemen, who soon discovered that Pei Tou, although travelling on foot, could easily out-distance the fastest horse. On coming to a river, they saw the fleeing priest enter a tea-cup, which carried him safely and swiftly to the opposite shore, so the hopeless pursuit was abandoned, and for years and years the "Cup Traveller," as he was afterwards styled, continued his lonely wanderings over the province of Kwangtung, but the beautiful image was never recovered.

"It is rumoured," said Mr. Foi, at the conclusion of the story, "that Pei Tou may even now be seen at times in wild and unfrequented localities."

"Have you ever heard the story of Pak Li-sho, who lived in the Chou dynasty?" said an elderly farmer who was vigorously drawing at a large hubble-bubble pipe. "No? Well, Pak Li-sho was of a restless spirit and could never abide long in one place, and, although he was married and had a son, he repeatedly left home, sometimes remaining away for months; and on one occasion he wandered so far that he lost his way in the Mae-ling mountains. During his absence his wife became poor and was ejected from her house; but,

being clever musicians, her son and she assumed the character of strolling players, and travelled about the Empire looking for Pak Li-sho. Years passed, but without news of the missing man who, in the meantime, had risen to high position and became the Viceroy of Hunan. One day, when the two weary musicians were passing through a city, they saw an official proclamation signed by the Viceroy, Pak Li-sho. Wondering whether this high mandarin could possibly be her husband, the poor woman visited the yamen, and heard from the servants that His Excellency was subject to frequent fits of dejection because he had lost his wife and child and could not find any trace of them. Whereupon the musician begged that she and her son might be allowed to play before the Viceroy, as it would perhaps divert his mind and cheer his drooping spirits. Permission was granted, and the two players were ushered into the presence of the great Pak Li-sho, who seemed stern and downcast; but directly his faithful wife touched the strings of her guitar, he listened intently, and then fixing his eyes upon her and the young man, he gave a cry of joy and, rising to his feet, embraced them both and wept; and the father, the son, and the wife were thus once again reunited after many sorrowful years."

"With reference to the Mae-ling mountains, which you just mentioned," said a middle-aged man of the party, "perhaps some of you have heard the old story of Wong Chih, the Taouist patriarch. When a boy he went up into those very mountains to cut firewood, but, happening to lose his way, he wandered about for some hours, and as darkness set in approached a creeper-

covered cave where he determined to pass the night. On entering, however, he saw two aged men seated before a marble table and playing a game of *wei-it*.^{*} Casting his axe and firewood down upon the ground, Wong Chih watched the game. After a time one of the venerable players rose and handed him a date-stone which he sucked, with the result that he lost all sense of thirst, hunger or weariness and again became absorbed in the contest. How long he must have stood there watching the players, no one knows; but at length, considering it was about time to return home, he leaned down to pick up his axe and firewood, when to his astonishment both axe and fuel crumbled to dust at his touch. Hurrying away, he retraced his steps homeward but, on entering his native village, noticed that great changes had taken place; and on enquiring about his family he learned that all his relations and friends had been dead for centuries. Poor Wong Chih was indeed alone! The people jeered at him when he told his story, so, being without money and friends, he returned to the mountains where the two aged men instructed him in the Taouist religion, and he lived on through ages; and it is said that he still inhabits a deep grotto in the Mae-ling or Nan-ling mountains."

Cheng now related a wonderful legend of one Ah Tsung's adventure with a snake-dragon, but it would take up a small volume to repeat all the tales and anecdotes which Mr. Foi's liberal hospitality and warm wine inspired that night; and the nerves of those present were

^{*} A very difficult game somewhat similar to chess only necessitating the use of 361 squares and 360 pieces.

long after the company had dispersed, and his host sat conversing together upon topics of interest to both, and it was three before they retired to rest.



CHAPTER XII

THE MISSIONARY AND THE STUDENT

Next morning Cheng was up betimes and accompanied Mr. Foy over his broad and fruitful lands, in which many contented husbandmen were toiling and singing; and then, after a good breakfast, he bade the genial farmer good-bye and once more resumed his journey.

Ah Sam seemed to have enjoyed himself as much as his master, and now and again smacked his lips, or made some expressive ejaculation, as he looked regretfully back and thought of all the good things he was leaving behind.

After descending the southern slope of the hill, they entered a fertile plain, where the sun shone upon glittering streams, fields of rice, millet, sugarcane and beans, and fruit-laden orchards whose trees bent beneath the weight of luscious *whampis*, *laichees* and other produce of the teeming soil.

They had been travelling for an hour or two, when Cheng suddenly heard the clattering of hoofs from behind and on looking round saw a foreigner, mounted on a wiry little pony, quickly approaching from the northward. It was Montrose, who had left Lien at four o'clock that morning.

...the latter was lying insensibly in a market place. But all his inherent distrust and prejudice against the *fang-kwei* now retreating, Cheng and he pretended not to notice the intruder; indeed, he turned off a little to avoid coming into contact with him.

Montrose had no idea who this grave, heavy young Chinaman was; still he felt friendly toward him, and, drawing rein, gave the usual salutation by asking whether he had eaten rice.

Cheng answered shortly though politely, showing, however, that he was not inclined to be communicative; while Ah Sam kept close to his master and suspiciously eyed the intruder. Montrose was accustomed to these proclivities of the "Celestials," and rather admired the young fellow for his manly, independent bearing.

"May I inquire," said Montrose, speaking in Cantonese, "what your honourable name is?"

"My humble name is Hung Fong Cheng," replied our precocious friend, not returning the compliment by inquiring the name of his interrogator.

"I presume you are a native of Lien-chi," said Montrose, regarding his companion attentively.

"No, I have not."

"Then you are not acquainted with the route?"

"No, I am afraid I am not," said Cheng, relaxing his frigid manner a little, "but I suppose you are?"

"Oh, yes," replied Montrose in a friendly tone. "I rode all the way from Canton to Lien, and, on arriving there, received such an agreeable reception from your townspeople that I am journeying all the way back, though a sadder and wiser man."

Cheng could hardly refrain from smiling at the missionary's quiet satirical allusion to his own terrible experiences.

"Why do you missionaries expose your lives for the sake of preaching your religion to the people of China?" he asked, adding with calm assurance: "Nothing will ever change our religious convictions which form the basis of our home life."

"We come to tell of the one true God: the Father and Creator of the world," said Montrose. "But if your so-called religion forms the basis of your home life, what forms the basis of your religion?"

"Filial piety," answered Cheng with dogmatic solemnity.

"I cannot help thinking," said Montrose, "that you carry filial piety to an absurdity; for your great sage, Confucius, even recommends a son to kill himself for his father's sake."

"Filial piety has held the *true* Emperors of China upon the throne," replied Cheng with ill-concealed chagrin, his face flushing. "It is a far-reaching protective arm, for, after strengthening the home, it goes forth even to the Dragon Throne, and—if he be worthy of it—embraces the Emperor, who is regarded as the earthly father of all children, and



the Son of Heaven. As Confucius says, 'a family is the prototype of the empire,' and thus the empire is consolidated by filial piety."

This subject was evidently distasteful to Cheng, so he changed it by asking his companion to explain to him the constitution of the English Government. Montrose did so, entering into and thoroughly expounding every detail of consequence.

Cheng listened attentively and, when he had thoroughly grasped the subject, said: "I do not like your administrative system, which seems founded, to a great extent, upon hereditary right and precedence. In China moral and intellectual merits are the only things which will help a man to gain political fame and position; whereas it seems that the son of an English peer succeeds to his father's seat in Parliament—perhaps to the exclusion of a wiser and more competent man. Here, honours are retrograde: the greatest distinction I could gain would be to have posthumous titles conferred upon my ancestors for several generations; and, notwithstanding the power and wealth my father might possess, I could never gain official standing otherwise than by my own rectitude and perseverance in studying, living correctly, and taking my degrees.

"In your country," he continued, "the poor—though wise and worthy—man must remain in that sphere of life into which he was born, unless he enjoys exceptional advantages for promotion; and, even then, it appears, he is handicapped from the commencement by class distinction and a proud aristocracy. On the other hand, in this country, the lowly-born man—providing his family is morally respectable—may possibly rise by his

own exertions to become an Imperial Councillor, and a member of the Han-lin; for probity and learning are accorded the respect and acknowledgment due to them.

"Here," he added, "religion and politics are inseparably united by all the traditions we hold most dear. Is it so in your country?"

"I am afraid not," said Montrose.

"Are your countrypeople all influenced by the same religious convictions?"

"Practically the same," answered Montrose, "only under various denominations."

"I mean, are you all members of one church?"

"No, our opinions differ regarding certain dogmas and ceremonies."

"That is bad," said Cheng; "for if there is religious difference, there *must* be political difference and party strife. Do your religious principles coincide with your scientific ones?"

"No, I am afraid they will never become reconciled to one another."

"Ah!" exclaimed Cheng, with proud conviction, "Confucianism and Buddhism are founded upon scientific principles—upon the wonderful laws of spiritual evolution—the *Yang* and *Yin* of the *Tae-kieh**, which embrace all things, even the atoms of dust upon which we tread. With us

* The philosophers of the "Middle Kingdom" speak of the *Tae-kieh* as the origin of all created things. This is represented in their books by a figure described by two reversed semi-circles drawn on the semi-diameters of a circle; and the two divisions represent the *Yang* and *Yin*, or male and female, and animate and inanimate principles which have produced all things. This "sexual system of the universe," as it has been called, influences every part of nature; for instance, the heavens and the sun are *Yang*, and the earth and moon *Yin*, and this extends to all things, from the molecules of human and animal flesh to the hard bamboo and the silken thread.



religion is our political rudder, and Confucius may well be called our invisible Prime Minister."

Montrose was much interested in the conversation, as it revealed to him the workings of the Chinaman's mind; but he reserved his arguments for another time, hoping to become better acquainted with the young student, in which case his words would have more weight and would be listened to with less prejudice.

At mid-day they rested awhile beneath the drooping foliage of a banyan tree; and Montrose drew from his satchel some rice-cakes, and handed a couple to Cheng who was about to take them, when Ah Sam, regarding the foreigner with angry suspicion, cried out, "Don't touch them, master!"

Whereupon Cheng drew back his hand, at the same time making a polite excuse.

After some light refreshment, the travellers mounted their ponies and pushed on at a brisk pace, for heavy clouds were rising from the southward, threatening a tropical storm, and the nearest town of Yang-chan was some miles ahead.

The light wind gradually died away, being succeeded by a period of oppressive calm, and the atmosphere became thick and heavy; while the voices of birds, the lively scissor-grinding of cicadas, and the deep bass notes of bull-frogs became hushed, as if they awaited in expectant silence the impending storm.

Our friends had not proceeded far, however, when a sudden flash of lightning almost blinded them, and was followed by a tremendous clap of thunder, like the bursting of a shell. Then a succession of flashes and crashes rent the sulphurous air.

Montrose noticed that at every report Cheng reverentially bowed his head low over his horse's neck; and, on asking him the reason of this, he replied: "I do this to pay proper homage to the God of Thunder. Heaven is offended with some person in this neighbourhood who has secretly committed a crime, and he or she will surely be struck; for the gods always avenge the hidden wrongs against Heaven."

"You speak," said Montrose, "as if the thunder killed, and not the lightning."

"And so it does," said Cheng, with a look of pitying contempt for this foreigner's ignorance. "The Goddess of Lightning throws a flash from her mirror upon the guilty wretch, thus revealing his whereabouts to the God of Thunder, who at once casts his destroying bolt which makes those terrible sounds as it rushes through the air to strike the condemned criminal."

"My conscience is clear, so I am not afraid," he added, jogging along complacently, though now and again making profound obeisances to the mighty thunder-god.

Montrose attempted to explain to him the true cause of those atmospheric disturbances, but he only smiled with disdainful incredulity and was commencing to argue in favour of his own absurd theory when the discussion was rudely interrupted by a terrific downpour of rain and hail. Fortunately they were each provided with a large umbrella made of thick oiled-paper, stitched upon a light framework of bamboo, which served as a protection both against sun and rain.

The storm did not last long, and greatly refreshed the surrounding vegetation; while a

be sociable and entertaining, and they
together upon various subjects; while
Ah Sam also grew less distrustful, and
dropped back to his original place at a
distance behind his young master.

In the brief time of twilight, just before
fall, they passed through an ancient cemetery
which could be seen several beautifully
marble tombs, evidently dating back to
prosperous and magnificent dynasty, some
Omega-shaped, and others like miniature
approached by flights of steps and ornamented
with grotesque figures. But most of them
were mere mounds, with here and there a
block of rough-hewn stone as a distinguishing
mark.

It was a lonely spot, and one well calculated
to work upon the superstitious imagination of the
Chinaman; and Cheng looked anxious
as if expecting to see some ghost arise. At
last, with an exclamation of horror, he drew
hurriedly from his breast a small
charm of some sort; while Ah Sam

considerably, for he would not move until his servant had ascertained that it had really fled.

Then turning, with a sigh of relief, to Montrose, he said: "Sure enough that was an old and powerful fox-demon."

"Nonsense," said Montrose, laughing good-humouredly; "the poor animal could do you no harm—not even if it were as venerable as yonder tomb."

"So you imagine, no doubt," replied Cheng, in a tone of mild rebuke; "but allow me to respectfully inform you, sir, that when a fox lives to be five or six hundred years old, it has, during its long life, absorbed and assimilated so much of the primogenial *yang* and *yen* essences and sweet dews—which, between sunset and sunrise, are diffused everywhere over the earth—that it becomes invested with extraordinary supernatural powers, and, besides being able to foretell future events, can assume human form. As the fox naturally has a preponderance of the female element in its system, it is thus enabled easily to transform itself into a woman. Now in order to strengthen and prolong its life indefinitely, it must gather into its constitution an equal portion of the male essence, and for this reason it becomes fatal to man when in contact with him.

"That fox we just saw," he added with an involuntary shudder, "evidently inhabits one of the adjacent tombs, and no doubt the spirits of the departed often make use of its body in order to chastise the sins which living persons have committed against them. It is a dreadful thing to be haunted by a fox-elf, and frequently drives one to madness or self-destruction."

they urged their tired animals into a cant
anxious to find a respectable lodging for t

In accordance with the Chinese ma
those who do a good deed should never
it, Cheng had not mentioned, or even hin
he had saved the Englishman's life.

It is astonishing what influence the liter
in the "Middle Kingdom," and Montro
had reason to congratulate himself upo
made the acquaintance of the young stu
the Taotai of Lien had caused a proclam
be circulated along the route to Canton,
people against giving the foreign missiona
or shelter,* and it would have gone hard w
had not Cheng, who was always actuated
most manly and humane feelings, taken the
in hand and bullied and threatened the pr
of a certain inn until the man became tho
ashamed of himself and agreed to rece
missionary providing he wore Chinese
while there.

Montrose readily consented to this stig
and soon provided himself with the ne
disguise. Then he

matting and furnished with a wash-hand stand and utensils, a few bamboo chairs and a square table-like bed provided with a mat to lie on, a hard bolster, a blanket, and a mosquito curtain. The window, which was open, was ornamented with carved woodwork, and was covered with oiled paper in place of glass.

Having by a free use of cold water and soap, removed the dust and grime from his person, Montrose went into the general tea-room, which was of considerable size and supplied with numerous small ebony tables and chairs, and large bowls and vases mounted on elegant stands and holding choice shrubs and flowers, while the walls were ornamented with caligraphic scrolls and quaint engravings of warlike scenes.

There he saw Cheng conversing with an elderly man. Both were sitting *in puris naturalibus*, having divested themselves of all their clothing, excepting a pair of light cotton trousers which were tucked up to the knees. The rest of the inmates were lounging about in a similar costume, and fans were much in evidence; for the weather was warm, and the wise "Celestial" studies comfort before appearance.

Cheng further evinced his friendly intentions toward his fellow traveller by proposing that they should dine together; and, as this invitation was gladly accepted, he upheld the hospitable traditions of his family by ordering the most sumptuous fare the inn could provide, and refused to allow Montrose to share the expense.

Ah Sam waited upon them assiduously, but on one occasion received a severe rebuke from his master for not answering the foreign guest with proper respect.

Cantonese gentleman who has taken his d at the English Medical College of Hong but the plot became known to the official was frustrated. However, the Doctor sailed Hongkong with one hundred men, who landed safely at Canton, where they were by some members of the Triad Society and disaffected people; but nearly all of them shortly afterwards seized, and several summarily tried and executed by order of the Viceroy. Doctor Sen seems to have escaped and a large reward is offered for him. It is rumoured that one of the unfortunate captives is the father of a much respected family residing in this town."

"How is it," asked Montrose, "that so many disturbances take place in this province?"

"Because the people of Kwangtung have always been independent spirited and loyal to the throne, and have consequently suffered much from the dethroned Mings, and have consequently suffered much at the hands of the Manchu-Tartars."

"Of all the Emperors of this dynasty, which one has been the most loved by his subjects?" inquired Montrose.

the Tsing dynasty since its accession (A.D. 1644), but was soon interrupted by the proprietor apologetically informing him with many manifestations of humility that, since his arrival in Yangchan had become publicly known, some students of the town had called to pay their respects to him and were waiting in the reception-room.

Hastily concluding his meal, Cheng excused himself and, bowing politely, left Montrose who soon afterwards retired to rest, being thoroughly tired.

On descending to the reception-room, Cheng found four students there. Neither of them, he soon learned, had yet taken the first degree, although they were older than himself; so they regarded him with great respect, and much bowing and speechifying went on until they subsided into a more genial and less informal party. They now invited him to accompany them to their club, where there was to be a meeting in behalf of a fellow student.

Leaving the hostelry, they passed along a narrow street and soon entered a small house over the door of which hung a large octagonal-shaped lantern, tastefully embellished with painted flowers and figures. Cheng was ushered by his companions into a fairly large room furnished with the usual raised platform and seats, with a red oval table, several chairs and some scrolls bearing verses and sentences written by local celebrities; while upon the northern wall was an illuminated inscription with the words: *If families have no sons devoted to letters, whence are the governors of the people to come?*

Other members of the literati soon arrived and,

colleagues.

"This meeting," he said, "has been called for the purpose of considering how we may assist the family of our noble brother student Mo-kwah, who is shortly departing from us to offer his life as a substitute for that respected father, who is now lying in prison in Canton awaiting execution for high treason. Having been implicated in the attempted rebellion, as you all know, under these circumstances the property of the accused will be confiscated. Poor Mrs. Tai and her family will—even if her husband is restored to her—be left practically penniless. As the proverb says, 'Kind feelings may be paid with kind feeling; but debts must be paid with hard cash,' and mere expressions of sympathy can little avail those in dire distress. Let us consider in what manner and to what extent we can be of service to the family of our brother friend. Poor Mo-kwah has always been steady and faithful to us, and in various ways has shown us much kindness; and, as the sage says, '*Debt of kindness is more binding than a loan.*'"

"Mr. Tai's little son has just been sent to Mr. Ho-ki's school," said one of the company, "and I will undertake the expenses of his education."

"That is good of you," said the eldest student; "and, if four of us subscribe a small sum of money each month, that will cover the household expenses of the family. I will give six dollars a month."

Whereupon five other members promised to contribute similar sums monthly.

"What is the value of their present house?" asked Cheng, who was ever ready to do a charitable deed.

"The rent comes to about twenty taels per month," replied another young man: "but I believe that the landlord would sell the place for one thousand five hundred taels."

"These will fetch at least two thousand taels," said Cheng, taking from his wrist two magnificent jadestone bangles and handing them to the senior student. "Sell them, and let the proceeds be laid out as your better judgment suggests. It will give me great pleasure to know that those trinkets have been the means of helping your worthy friends."

Having concluded the charitable business of the meeting, the party left the club and proceeded to the residence of the unfortunate Tai family. The house, which was soon reached, was not a large one, though of respectable dimensions, and contained a small courtyard and garden.

On knocking at the front-door, they were admitted by an elderly manservant, and, after passing the outer offices, were met by the younger son, a bright-eyed, intelligent-looking child of nine.

KWANG CHING-CHOW TO MOVE HIS FEELINGS.

He was a young man of about two-and-twenty, with clear-cut, intellectually-cast features, deep-lashed eyes and pale complexion; while his manner, though shy, was characterised by a certain winsome dignity. He was the most distinguished scholar in that district, and had particularly endeared himself to his fellow townspeople by his gentle and unassuming behaviour and unfailing courtesy.

He was introduced to Cheng, with whom he sat and conversed for some minutes in a subdued and cultured voice; and he manifested such a keen interest in the opinions and aspirations of his acquaintance, and, withal, appeared so cheerful and resigned, that he at once gained his friendship and admiration.

It was a solemn and affecting occasion when those present acted with becoming gravity and sensitiveness; their touching expressions of sympathy and reverence being particularised by refinement of manner and feeling.

At length this brave-hearted youth rose from his chair, and, resting one hand upon the

friends and kinsmen," said Mo-kwah in a voice which was tremulous at first, but grew stronger as he proceeded. "We have passed through childhood together; your sorrows, pursuits and pleasures have been mine, and mine yours, so we are united by all the ties and traditions we have learned to hold most dear. In the happy past, during the spring-times of many seasons, we have regularly visited the tombs of our honoured forefathers, and have there made our humble prayers and oblations; but next spring I shall not be with you, and if it should so happen that my father likewise never returns, I pray you befriend my younger brother, who will act in our stead, and instruct him in the sacred duties to those who repose within the ancestral tomb. Receive him among you and encourage him in the pursuit of virtue and knowledge."

"We will!" We will!" came the unanimous, heart-spoken response, as those present caringly drew the little fellow among them and received him as their own; and for a moment there was unbroken silence.

"Even now," continued the speaker, "I can hardly realise that we are about to part for ever—that this is actually the last time I shall have the pleasure of your company and the honour of addressing you. By suffering the penalty of a noble deed, and by preserving my parent's life, I render homage to the memory of the dethroned Mings and show fealty to their rightful heirs. I go hence to inscribe my name upon the long roll-call of honour, bequeathed by bleeding sire to son, for it is the proud and unconquerable destiny of our fellow-countrymen of this province to struggle

for light and freedom, and, if needs be, to perish for a righteous cause; and the cannon-balls which will surely some day shatter and destroy the rotten walls of this dynasty, and strike to the hearts of the base usurpers and murderers of the Mings, will be cast in the skulls of the martyrs whose heads daily fall to the sword of the oppressor; and the guns will be charged with the pent-up vengeance of those sorrowing survivors who have thus lost their only kith and kin.

"In conclusion," he continued, "I exhort you to cling to one another, to exercise yourselves in virtue and learning, and to stand firm; and if, in future days, some of you rise to power and position in the land—which I have no doubt you will,—and should you be so favoured by the gods as to see the glad time of this Empire's regeneration, when the people rise to replace the descendents of the long-loved Mings upon the throne, then join hands, and let the sacred bonds of early brotherhood remove the barriers which wrongfully separate the rich and poor; and unity will make your strength invulnerable. I pray heaven that you may all live to see the sun of the day of bondage set, and to herald the dawn of another great and glorious age.

"I have said all that I had to say," added the speaker, stretching his arms out toward his friends, "I thank you sincerely for your patience in listening to me; and from the bottom of my heart I thank you for all that I feel assured you will do for my little brother. Take him among you and watch over him—and may the gods be with you and recompense you!"

Cheng had listened with rapt attention to this oration; and it made a lasting impression upon his

sensitive mind. And on learning that Tai was leaving for Canton at an early hour next morning, he asked to be allowed to accompany him on the journey; and his offer was gladly accepted.

Having partaken of some light refreshment, the party left the heroic heart-broken student to keep his last vigil among the shades of his ancestors, and escorted Cheng back to the inn. The latter then went in search of Montrose and, after tapping thrice at the door of his room, was admitted. Not wishing to intrude unnecessarily upon his slumbers, he informed him that it was his intention to leave the town at four o'clock the next morning, as he wished to continue his journey with a young man who had a sacred and urgent duty to perform at Canton.

Montrose said that he would join him in good time, and asked him to give instructions that he might be called at three o'clock.

Next morning, at the appointed hour, our friends left the inn, and on reaching the southern outskirts of the town were joined by Tai Mo-kwah, who was escorted for some distance by his fellow-students, all of whom treated him with marked reverence and affection. Tai was mounted on a pony, but was not accompanied by any servitor, and Ah Sam was instructed to pay him every attention; for both Montrose and Cheng were eager to make the young man's sorrowful journey as pleasant as was possible under the circumstances.

At length the students of Yang-chan took leave of their beloved comrade, and the parting was a memorable one; when it was over, and they turned to go their respective ways, a melancholy salute was fired with crackers in the customary manner.

Breaking into a brisk trot, the travellers soon left the town far behind, and after a time passed over a hill which, from the distance, looked like an immense mound of snow, being entirely clothed with the wild downy myrtle (*Mystus tomentosa*) laden with bunches of sweet berries.

Poor Tai soon endeared himself to his companions by his simple and earnest manner, and by the high moral and intellectual tone of his conversation; and they did their utmost to distract his thoughts from the griefs which oppressed him.

We must now leave them to pursue their journey, and return for a time to the city of Lien.



CHAPTER XIII

PLOT AND COUNTER-PLOT

The Taotai's tyrannical conduct and barefaced "squeezing," which had brought misery to many homes, was becoming unbearable, and at last Hung Fong was obliged to plead his inability to make further contributions toward His Excellency's various industrial schemes. Mr. Hung knew full well that practically the whole of the money thus extorted had been appropriated by Shun Ming, whose coffers were reported to be full to overflowing of treasure; and so great was the distress caused by the predatory incursions of this monster that the poorer classes were brought to the direst straits, and hungry, desperate men began to prowl the streets by night. Lien was no longer the bright and prosperous place of former years, and a deep gloom had settled upon its inhabitants.

Perhaps the most miserable and discontented man in that city was Mr. Hung Fong's good-for-nothing relative, the opium-smoking Hung Hoi, who found it harder than ever to obtain sufficient of that pernicious drug—which is expensive—to satisfy his craving for it, and equally difficult to borrow money, even from his large-hearted cousin;

while his creditors became exceedingly clamorous and demanded the repayment of their loans. So Hung Hoi was on his beam-ends; nevertheless, being a crafty, resourceful and utterly unprincipled man, he had for some time been hatching a plot by which he hoped—at the least possible risk to himself—to use to his own advantage the growing spirit of dissatisfaction which prevailed in the city, particularly among the working people. He was planning a riot and a simultaneous raid upon the Taotai's treasury, and in order to accomplish this hazardous enterprise had enlisted the aid of the most desperate characters in the neighbourhood.

The utmost secrecy was observed by Hung Hoi and his carefully-chosen confederates, who met twice a week in one of the rooms of that ruined temple, into which—as the reader will remember—Montrose had happened to make his way one evening, evidently when one of these lawless meetings was being held.

The time for the projected *coup* was fast approaching, and one night Hung Hoi was cautiously and by a roundabout route pursuing his way to the usual rendezvous, with a view to making final arrangements, when one of the many spies employed by the wily Taotai, who had already been apprised of this man's machinations, caught sight of him and at once dogged his steps.

On arriving at the entrance to the dilapidated garden at the rear of the temple, Hung Hoi opened the door, closed it behind him, and, hastening across the open space, soon disappeared behind a shrubbery. A moment or two afterwards his pursuer reached the gate, which he vainly endeavoured to open, and, on noiselessly raising himself upon it

and looking over, he concluded that the garden was deserted. Being strongly suspicious that there was a mystery here, and probably some underhand work being carried on, he at once made his way round to the other side of the ruined fane, with the environs of which he was acquainted, though he had never entered the building; and on coming to the tree-shaded courtyard, in which Lao Chin's humble domicile stood, he kept close to the wall and crept cautiously towards the moss-covered steps, which he ascended.

Pausing upon the terrace, he peered long and earnestly into the dark and desolate interior, feeling somewhat squeamish about entering, since he quite believed the story that the place was haunted by the ghost of a defunct priest.

As his eyes became more accustomed to the gloom, the hideous images seemed to grow in proportion to his superstitious misgivings, and to assume menacing attitudes; nevertheless, he did not mean to relinquish his quest, for his curiosity was aroused to a high pitch and soon outgrew his scruples, and he was a man accustomed to unpleasant situations.

While hesitating upon the threshold of this archaic shrine, now peeping inquiringly within, and now casting fearful glances at the gnome-like occupants, he heard the sound of subdued voices, apparently coming from the far end of the ruin. He at once crept forward, and, feeling his way over the fallen masonry and other debris, soon descried a dim light issuing from a small cranny in the wall towards which he crept on hand and knees.

To return to Hung Hoi, he gained the secret rendezvous without mishap and there found six of



his confederates awaiting him. They were fierce, starved-looking men who greeted the wizen-faced opium-smoker, yet they regarded him with a certain amount of deference, for he had been the originator and organiser of the intended riot, and had done much to fan the smouldering temper of the populace into a vehement flame, while those who were entrusted with the leadership of the rabble looked to him for instruction and encouragement. They were not disappointed in this respect, for Hung Hoi, besides giving detailed directions, drew a glowing picture of the short and victorious raid upon the Taotai's treasury, and an equally inspiring comparison between their present life of misery and privation, and the one they would lead when possessed of some thousands of *taels* which they would skilfully extract from their intended victim's coffers.

That part of the programme which related to the Yamen was not to be revealed to the *foex populi* whose only hope of plunder lay in pillaging the houses of minor officials and unpopular civilians.

"It will not take long," said that Celestial *chevalier d'industrie*, smiling diabolically, and with nervous fingers extracting a paper from his pocket and glancing at it. "As arranged, to-morrow night, at half-past ten, about forty of our men will congregate outside Hu-pao's tea-shop and will march through the city, carrying the flags and lanterns with which they have provided themselves, and making as much noise as possible with drums and gongs, so as to attract attention and gather a large following. On arriving at the north-western part of the city, they will discharge two petards

and several long strings of crackers, which will be the signal for a general tumult in which a large number of the unemployed are expected to join.

"Two of you, Loi and Fah, will lead, and, when necessary, restrain the rioters—for there must be no bloodshed—and you must be careful to confine your operations to the north-western district, and be equally careful not to allow the attack upon the treasury to become known. *We* must dexterously crack *that* egg and divide the yolk among ourselves.

"No doubt the Taotai will at once despatch his entire bodyguard of Eight-banner men* to quell the disturbance, thus leaving his residence unprotected. We shall be apprised of their departure by the man Kwong-lip; and then you, San, Hok, Pao and Ah-cho, will sally forth from this place with your chosen band of ten and proceed to the side door of the yamen, which is usually left unbarred. Since you are well acquainted with the exact position of the treasury, there seems every likelihood of your being able to conduct this venture to a successful issue.

"I shall remain here as my presence might be required at any moment to avert disaster or inspire confidence in case of any unforeseen event happening. It is judicious and necessary to take precautions against all possible contingencies, however remote they may appear, therefore I have prepared an excellent hiding-place for the booty, in case of your being closely pursued. But I am sure all will go well; indeed, I have every

* It is usual in every Chinese city of importance to have some Manchu-Tartar troops of the "Eight-banners" tribe, in which no Chinaman ever serves. These men are cruel and despotic wretches who are feared and hated by the Chinese.



confidence both in you and in the practicability of our scheme, and, directly you return here, we will recompense our men, as agreed upon, with fifty *taels* each, and divide the bulk of the treasure among ourselves."

Hung Hoi paused for a moment to take breath; and his claw-like fingers involuntarily closed over imaginary wealth, as he continued:

"You, Loi and Fah, must quickly rejoin me when the soldiers appear upon the scene. It will not be easy or convenient to carry so much bullion with us, and, as we have decided to quit Lien without delay, I have made arrangements for our transport by hiring a couple of ponies for each man, and they will be properly equipped for our purpose and secreted within this ruin by ten o'clock to-morrow night. By that time the city will be in an uproar, so that nothing will impede our victorious flight; and in the event of our being pursued, or of our finding the spoil too cumbersome, we could easily bury a part of it for the time being.

"I think," he added, preparing to depart, "that everything is satisfactorily arranged and in proper working order; so we will now repair to our respective abodes and await the time when riches shall be ours."

The wary spy had overheard the entire plot and, directly Hung Hoi and his confederates concluded the meeting and began to disperse, he swiftly and noiselessly crept out of the ruin by the way he had entered and returned with all haste to the yamen. He at once sought the presence of his august master who condescendingly granted him a private audience.

Shun Ming's face was an interesting study as

he complacently listened to the disquieting news ; still he did not evince any surprise or passion, and only betrayed his heedfulness by a few significant grunts. But strange and varied expressions of cunning and malignity flitted across his forbidding physiognomy, which now and again arched its furrows into a curious smile that boded no good for those whom it concerned.

"Catfoot, you have acted discreetly," he at length said, addressing the spy by his nickname. Then, taking a slip of paper from a table upon which his elbow had been resting, and drawing an ink-slab to him, he selected a finely-pointed brush and leisurely indited the following note :—

TO HOW SENG WUI, MAGISTRATE OF LIEN.

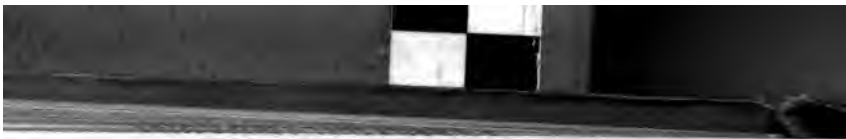
MOST WORTHY AND HONOURABLE COLLEAGUE ;—That I should be compelled to trouble you after the arduous duties of your office are over for the day, makes my heart sorrowful ; but affairs of some importance oblige me to request you to honour me with a private visit at your earliest leisure this night. Please dispense with as many of your escort as possible, secrecy being essential in this case.

SHUN, *Taotai*.

Folding this missive and enclosing it in an oblong-shaped envelope, to which he affixed his "chop," or seal, he handed it to Catfoot.

"Deliver this, without delay, into the hands of the magistrate," he said, "and, as you love your neck and my money, let your mouth be as silent as your tread, and your eyes as keen as the executioner's sword."

When the man had gone, His Excellency summoned his pipe-bearer, and for some time sat languidly smoking and ruminating, his countenance being illumined by a peaceful smile.



In less than half an hour the judiciary *taipan* was announced. How Seng Wui was a lean, diminutive man, with a sharp nose, prominent cheek-bones and small ferine eyes, one of which constantly squinted; while his manner—which was characterised by an artificial levity and sprightliness—betokened mildness of temper combined with duplicity, hardness of heart and nervousness bordering upon pusillanimity.

"I have hastened to obey your summons, most generous master," he said, clasping his hands and similingly exchanging elaborate salutations with Shun Ming.

After the usual ceremonials were performed, the host led his visitor to the seat of honour. Then, with true Oriental *sang froid*, he discoursed for some time upon trivial topics and with studied obliquity gradually approached the paramount question at issue.

"We must take darkness and sunshine as they come," he observed meditatively, refilling his pipe and handing it to the magistrate, their attendants having been dismissed; "and when exigencies arise, so must we rise to meet and surmount them."

His companion deferentially inclined his head to listen, and then bowed an assent, and for some minutes both men remained in silent contemplation of the tenuous clouds of smoke which slowly circled upward from the mutual pipe of peace.

"Well, sir," at length said the magistrate, "as the proverb says, 'life is nothing more than a theatrical performance,' changing from gay to grave, and from comedy to tragedy."

"Quite true, my friend," quoth the Taotai; "and, according to all accounts, you and I are

likely to soon witness a raree-show which bids fair to terminate tragically for some of the puppets. To-morrow night there is to be a procession, and a rehearsal of the harvest moon festival; and, to judge by the programme, some of the swarthy rustics who are to participate in it hope to prematurely gather in the silvery grain, since they are under the impression that the time is ripe for so doing."

"Ah, well," said the magistrate, endeavouring to appear calm, but evidently ill at ease, "such is this mortal life—the good grain and the bad grain alike fall beneath the unerring and inevitable sickle of fate."

"Yes, quite true," responded the Taotai; "but, to follow your wise interpretation of the allegory, if the bad grain be allowed to grow to maturity and spread, it will in time contaminate the field. Therefore, allowing that we two hold a two-handed sword, which is equally as sharp as any agricultural implement, and instead of waiting for the unerring, though procrastinating, sickle of fate, I would, with all just deference, venture to advise the policy of summarily rooting out and destroying that which is likely to prove hurtful to its fellows."

"Your words are words of wisdom," said the magistrate, nervously handling his fan, "and from them I deduce that you are interested in the events of to-morrow."

"My words are not so full of wisdom as of prudence," answered the Taotai, acknowledging the compliment with a lordly inclination of the head, but ignoring the inference.

"In what way can I be of service to you?" asked the little man; "for it is my duty and desire to assist you in maintaining law and decorum in this city."

"Sir, your intentions are commendable," replied the Taotai; adding in a quiet though peremptory voice: "I require some delicate work performed, so I must ask you to spare me ten of the ablest and strongest men in your guard."

Knowing what a timorous and inquisitive individual the magistrate was, Shun Ming took a particular pleasure in tantalising him in a quiet, genteel manner; and now--having been promised the requisite number of men--instead of revealing to him the true state of affairs, he indulged in a further flight of metaphorical eloquence which ended in his inviting him to another private conference at an early hour on the following morning.

How Seng Wui smilingly pledged his willingness to co-operate with His Excellency and to comply with his wishes, and retired in a state of sad perturbation, inwardly anathematising him for his abstruseness; for the interview had inspired him with considerable alarm, and had aroused, yet not satisfied, his curiosity.

Soon after daybreak the next morning, How Seng Wui—who had passed a somewhat restless night—was again closeted with the Taotai, who at length revealed to him the details of the plot to ransack the treasury and cause a riot in the north-western quarter of the city.

The magistrate listened attentively, and then suggested the advisability of at once taking steps to maintain the peace by sending soldiers to capture the chief conspirators.

"No, no, my friend! A thunderstorm often does much good," replied His Excellency with a crafty smile. "Let them do their worst and commit themselves; and, instead of their reaping a rich

reward, they shall gather in for us a goodly harvest.

"I have given orders," he continued, "that the few soldiers stationed at the guard-house near the south gate shall hold themselves in readiness to proceed at nine o'clock to-night to the old Foo-yen Yamen in the north-west district, where the riot is to take place. They will be disguised, but easily distinguishable to our people, and will be secreted near the spacious courtyard into which the mob is to be lured by one of my men who will join the procession and point out the two leaders, Loi and Fah, who will be dealt with summarily, while their followers are surrounded and imprisoned."

"But what about those who are to attack the treasury?" asked the magistrate, whose face began to brighten now he learned that his own precious body was not likely to be placed in any jeopardy.

"Well," proceeded Shun Ming, "on hearing the pre-arranged signal for the riot to commence, which will be given by firing petards and crackers, I shall at once dispatch to the scene of the disturbance a number of my sturdy runners and coolies, who will be well armed and dressed as soldiers. Those who are to attack the treasury will be straightway acquainted of this by their spy, and—thinking that I have sent forth to the fray my Five-Banner braves, and have left the Yamen unprotected—they will hurry thither and, finding the side entrance unbarred, rush into the trap prepared for them.

"As the proverb says," he added, "'large fowls will not eat small grain,' and, judging from my own taste, that is quite true. Regarding the minor conspirators, we can hardly expect to derive much



gratification from their capture, though their execution will teach the citizens a wholesome lesson; but with those belonging to the Hung family it is different: we must therefore turn our attention to the man Hung Hoi, who is reported to be at the bottom of all the mischief, though I have every reason to believe there is another relative of his who is even more deeply implicated. This Hung Hoi is a cowardly villain, and, according to his own arrangement, is to remain in hiding while his confederates do the work; but his refuge is known to me and immediately the outbreak occurs I shall take steps to secure his person."

The magistrate returned to his residence in a more tranquil state of mind than he had on the day previous, for he liked dispensing the law better than maintaining it, and in this case the latter responsibility had been lifted from his shoulders by the active Shun Ming, whom he left in the best of humour.

The day passed quietly and uneventfully, though in the north-west quarter of the city many of the shopkeepers closed their establishments at an unusually early hour, having been forewarned, perhaps, of impending trouble; and as darkness set in, the more respectable inhabitants of that district retired to their homes, leaving the streets in the possession of those denizens who had neither money nor reputation to stake.

Hung Hoi was not out and meddling with other people's affairs that day, and, when the darksome hour for the completion of his stratagem drew nigh, he stretched himself upon a mat and refreshed himself with a smoke of opium. Then, having concealed a loaded horse-pistol in the ample sleeve

of his jacket, he sallied forth into the narrow street, and hurried along in the direction of the ruined temple.

After proceeding some distance, he suddenly turned into a more crowded thoroughfare and soon paused before a fortune-teller's booth where a venerable man sat in profound contemplation of the mysteries of necromancy. Like all Chinamen, Hung Hoi was very superstitious and rarely embarked upon any enterprise without first ascertaining whether the fates were propitious, so he now consulted the wizard.

Having received his fee, the old man placed three ancient copper cash into the hollow shell of a small tortoise, and, while muttering incantations, shook it vigorously for some moments and then emptied the coins out upon a round table, the result being determined by their facial position. In this case the prognostication was favourable to Hung Hoi who went on his way rejoicing and believing that all would go well with him.

On arriving at the usual rendezvous in the joss-house, he found his six confederates awaiting him, each one being armed with a sword or pistol, while ten villainous-looking characters, carrying axes and swords concealed under their clothing, were standing at the back entrance in readiness to start on the raiding expedition.

So far no hitch had occurred! The Taotai's Yamen was being closely watched; the horses had arrived and were safely hidden in the main hall of the temple. The intending rioters were ready and waiting to form the procession; the streets were clear, and there were no signs of any official contravention.



Everything being in readiness, the men Loi and Fah hastened away to marshal the rabble, while Hung Hoi and the other leaders sat down and anxiously awaited developments.

Presently the distant beating of a drum was heard, and the sound gradually grew in volume and was augmented by other instruments such as gongs, horns, cymbals, and clarionets. Then cries were heard as people ran to witness or join the procession; and at length these unmelodious sounds died away and were succeeded by a short period of ominous silence.

Suddenly two loud reports rang out, accompanied by uproarious shouts and the discharge of crackers.

Hung Hoi now became very agitated, and began to fear the possible consequences should his scheme fail and he be captured. However, there was little time for thinking, and very soon his meditations were interrupted by the increased medley of sounds proceeding from the north-west; and while he and his companions were eagerly listening to them, the spy who had been stationed near the Taotai's Yaman rushed in and informed them that His Excellency had despatched a considerable force of braves to the scene of the riot.

"Now is the time!" cried Hung Hoi, regaining courage in the excitement of the moment and urging his confederates to start on their perilous mission.

With a look of desperate determination written upon their faces, the four men hurried from the temple and as quickly and silently as possible led their small band of mercenaries out of the courtyard at the rear of the building and along the deserted street.

The hubbub was growing wilder and louder every moment, and Hung Hoi—now left alone in the dismal ruin—paced up and down the damp pavement, at intervals pausing to listen or to look at the priming of his pistol, it being an anxious time for him, and one that tried his opium-weakened nerves.

Presently a sharp volley of musketry attracted his attention and made him aware that a conflict was taking place between the rioters and soldiers; and as he turned from the entrance of the dark passage, where he had been standing for some minutes, he heard light and rapid steps behind him, and before he had moved another step, his arms were pinioned from the back and he was forced to the ground.

In a moment the apartment was filled with armed men, yet Hung Hoi made a desperate attempt to free himself and in the struggle fired his pistol and wounded one of his assailants.

"Resistance is useless!" cried Catfoot, who had been entrusted with the arrest; "all your followers are prisoners in the hands of His Excellency, Shun Ming."

With a fierce groan of disappointment Hung Hoi submitted to his fate. Having been handcuffed and somewhat roughly handled during the process, he was led away to the gaol situated a little distance away from the magistrate's yamen. This place consisted of several small yards, communicating by means of circular holes in the wall and surrounded by several small, low-roofed cells which were—as is usual with Chinese prisons—in a filthy condition, though during the time that Mr. Mo Kwang, the last magistrate, held office in

Lien, the prison was clean and seldom used. The head gaoler was a petty mandarin of the ninth degree, and entitled to wear a worked gilt button on his hat, and he was assisted by a scoundrelly-looking ruffian who went by the name of Severneck, who also acted in the capacity of executioner, and was hated and feared by all who were unfortunate enough to be delivered into his keeping.

"By Kwang Tai! Welcome to this snug little palace, Mr. Hung Hoi," he said with a malignant leer, as the prisoner was brought in. "It is the first time we have met, though your face seems familiar to me; but I have had the pleasure of entertaining a few of the honest members of your guild.

"Come with me," he added, leading him to a filthy-looking little den, protected by iron bars. "Here is a comfortable residence, fit for a prince, and there is a soft mud couch where you can rest your weary bones. Some of your friends are also comfortably lodged over there, and I am expecting other guests very shortly."

The prisoner's legs were now heavily manacled, his arms being secured in a similar manner, and round his neck was fastened an iron collar attached to a six-foot chain which ran to a ring-bolt in the ground. Then his person was diligently searched, with the result that several incriminating papers were found upon him, chief among them being a muster roll of fellow conspirators and a carefully written, though unsigned, scheme of revolt, also about one tael of silver and some copper cash which the gaoler appropriated. When left alone in the darkness, Hung Hoi sat down upon a wooden block, which was the only furniture the

cell was provided with, and brooded over his misery. Now and again the sounds of distant strife were audible, and while they lasted he did not utterly despair, as there was a remote possibility of the rioters getting the upper hand of the soldiers and looting the city, in which case his rescue might have been effected; but these sounds soon died away, being succeeded by quietude, and no hope of deliverance was left to solace him. Moreover, other prisoners were constantly arriving until the prison was full of rebellious Lienites, over whom a guard of ruffianly soldiers was placed. However, many of the poor wretches were liberated after the gaolers and soldiers had, by torture and threats, squeezed the last penny out of them and exacted promises of more; for a Chinaman will do anything to escape the far-reaching arms of the law, to be in the clutches of which means certain ruin and perhaps death; but the chief conspirators were reserved for a worse fate.

At ten o'clock the next morning the prisoner was removed in his chains and under an armed guard to the court-house of the Yamen, which was a spacious, oblong-shaped apartment, at the head of which stood the tribunal, consisting of a narrow table covered with red cloth, surmounted by an embroidered canopy, and holding the official seal and elaborate writing materials. Here sat the magistrate and by his side the Taotai, who seldom attended any legal functions, and his presence on this occasion signified a trial for treason, and foreboded death and disaster to some unfortunate family. Both officials were attired in their gorgeous robes of State, and behind stood soldiers and title-

leisurely drew a few whiffs of smoke from
hubble-bubble.

Hung Hoi turned cold and quaked when he caught sight of his mighty judge. Grovelling before them, he knocked his head upon the floor.

"Have mercy, my lords, upon a poor man," he whined, as two powerful henchmen, in obedience to a sign from the magistrate, came to him nearer the tribunal and made him kneel upon a mat of thin-linked chains which cut into the flesh of the knee.

The interpreter of the court now read the indictment, which accused one Hung Hoi, and one Lien, of conspiring with others to cause rebellion, to rob the treasury, and to loot the provinces, and to do bodily harm to the innocent and the virtuous, servants and subjects of His Imperial Majesty the Emperor of China; and of actually causing the same revolt whereby lives had been lost and great damage done to property.

"Prisoner," said the magistrate, "what have you to say for yourself?"

"I can only repeat, my lord, that I am innocent of the crimes imputed to me," answered Hung Hoi, looking the picture of injured innocence.

"I merely sought refuge there, my lord, as I am a nervous man and was afraid of being maltreated by the fierce and excited mob."

Shun Ming smiled broadly and maliciously and turned to the magistrate.

"As the proverb says, my worthy colleague, 'Eggs are close things, yet the chickens come out at last,' but, in this case, instead of waiting for the hatching process, we might more conveniently crack the egg with the bamboo; which is a strong and useful plant, whose cultivation engenders truth."

"Believe me, my lords," pleaded Hung Hoi with well-feigned fervour, reading the menace of the Taotai's metaphor, "truth is a gem which I prize above all other of my meagre possessions: the one and only treasure I hold."

"Yes," drolly replied the little magistrate, squinting and smiling, "I suspect that, like the serpent, you hold that precious gem in your head; therefore I am afraid we shall be compelled to deprive you of that useful part of your body in order to discover the treasure."

Having conferred in an undertone with the Taotai, he made a sign to one of the bystanders, who at once stepped forward to the prisoner and, in spite of his remonstrances, struck the palm of his hand several times with a piece of bamboo. This was a very lenient mode of punishment, and those who had witnessed its infliction wondered at the moderation of their masters.

Hung Hoi was then cross-examined, but without eliciting much information, for he was crafty and careful; and at length, with a loud yawn, the Taotai proposed that the court should be adjourned for an hour.

"Clear the court," said the magistrate, rising from his chair; and, as Shun Ming whispered something in his ear, he added, "Close the doors, and let the prisoner remain alone where he is, that he may repent of his evils and also have time to reflect and learn prudence."

As the two great men walked away through a shady courtyard and entered one of the private apartments at the rear of the yamen, the Taotai turned to his companion and said: "I am of opinion that this Hung Hoi is merely a hired mercenary—a puppet in the hands of some designing person who is at the bottom of this conspiracy."

How Seng Wui agreed that such might be the case; for he knew nothing about the papers which had been found in Hung Hoi's possession and which conclusively proved that he, and he alone, was the instigator of the riot. But Shun Ming had made his own deep scheme of reprisal, which he was determined to carry out at all costs, and these papers were his trump-cards.

"I am strongly suspicious," he added, "that another and more influential member of the Hung family is implicated in this audacious plot. I should therefore like to privately interrogate the prisoner; so, if you have no objection, I will avail myself of this opportunity now he is alone, while you take the rest and refreshment you urgently require."

Of course the magistrate raised no objection, and the wily Taotai made his way back to the court-room, which was quite deserted, save for the miserable prisoner who was crouching near the tribunal.

"Well, Mr. Hung," said His Excellency in a tone of commiseration, a smile playing upon his

face as he approached him, "I should certainly be sorry to deprive your honourable guild of its head man, and still more so to punish an innocent person.

"I have reason to believe," he continued, producing from his pocket a roll of paper, "that a certain cousin of yours, named Hung Fong, is the real traitor and ringleader in this revolt. No doubt this document emanated from his hand and, for that reason, I feel disposed to give you a chance of saving your life by helping me to bring the true culprit to justice; and if you can at an early date provide me or the magistrate with any information that will assist us in discovering another such treasonable document as this in the possession of the man Hung Fong—that is in any part of his house or grounds—you will be pardoned of all complicity in the crime and at once liberated. I am only influenced by the most humane motives in allowing you to thus vindicate your honour and establish the guilt of one who has oppressed you."

His Excellency now turned and walked away, and, as he did so, a paper fluttered down in front of Hung Hoi, who picked it up and saw at a glance that it was his own plan of revolt; but, strange to say, Mr. Hung Fong's signature had been attached at the end, having evidently been forged with the help of a letter from his cousin, which had been found upon him and which referred to pecuniary assistance rendered by the generous merchant.

He knew perfectly well what Shun Ming wanted him to do and, although he was a bad, vicious man, and jealous of his prosperous relative, he recoiled from the idea of perpetrating such a cruel and treacherous deed upon one of his own kith and kin. But his life was at stake and, being

was led away into the streets, being to walk slowly in consequence of the upon his legs.

A crowd of people followed him at first gradually dispersed, and at length, at a thoroughfare which ran for some parallel with the western wall of Mr. F's residence, his keeper ordered him to retire these bounds. The man then left blazing sun, and went to a neighbor where he could sit in shelter and watch.

It was now almost one o'clock, and in the early morning Hung Hoi had not been able to obtain a smoke of opium or any food, weary, famished, and half delirious hours he remained in the vicinity of the house, though without any of the knowledge of his presence there; and still from doing the dastardly deed was condemn to destruction an innocent family. But presently he heard the guitar within the ground, and at intervals and mirthful laughter. Then the within him, and, cursing his affluence involuntarily felt for the fatal document.

withdrew from his pocket and carefully folded. At that moment he saw the soldier who was guarding him prepare to leave the booth, for the purpose of conducting him back to prison, and with a quick, vindictive motion he stepped a few paces from the wall and threw the paper over into the garden.

Being now half-past six, the guilty wretch was allowed to return to the gaol, and was again incarcerated in his noisome cell where he passed another miserable night, being only supplied with sufficient rice, and that of the worst quality, to keep life in his emaciated body. And, although the kind-hearted Hung Fong contrived, by heavily bribing the gaolers, to send him some warm wine and cake and a little opium, only a small percentage of these things were delivered. This was a simple but very effective official way of coercing him, through sheer want and desperation, into abject obedience and humility.

Next morning at ten he was again dragged into the court-house where his judges were sitting in solemn and imposing magnificence. His Excellency, Shun Ming, smiled benignly upon his servile retainers and cracked a joke at the expense of his miserable victim who *kowtowed* lowly and reverently to his betters, and then almost fainted with fatigue and trepidation.

"Prisoner," at length said the magistrate, squinting horribly, "it has come to our knowledge that you were not the chief party in the serious revolt which has just occurred, but that you were simply the hired emissary of a seditious and unscrupulous traitor to whom you were under an obligation which placed you in his power. Is that so?"

"Yes, my lord," answered Hung Hoi in a weak vacillating voice.

"What is the name of the man who employed you?"

Here the prisoner seemed to collapse into a lifeless heap; but it was not the first time the wily magistrate had seen people simulate unconsciousness, and by moving his hand he made a sign which caused three men to spring towards the prisoner. Two of them straightened his body out, while the other fastened upon his ankles a bamboo contrivance worked with cords and toggle by which the ankle-bones were squeezed together. This machine had no sooner commenced working than Hung Hoi screamed out at the top of his voice and struggled in a very lively manner.

"Speak, my man!" cried the Taotai in a shrill voice, "for we do not wish to maim you for life."

The prisoner, to whose body animation had been quickly given, was allowed to again kneel before his judges to whom he protested his innocence and pleaded ignorance of the name of his leader.

"Then, my good man, you must suffer in his stead," said the magistrate, and at a sign from him the ankle-machine was again put in motion.

"Mercy! mercy, my lords!" cried the unhappy wretch, writhing with pain. "It was Hung Fong, the merchant."

A look of well-feigned surprise and also triumphant exultation overspread Shun Ming's face as he whispered something to the magistrate.

"Clear the court," said the latter in a tone of deep import; and all their hirelings hurried away, leaving Hung Hoi alone with his judges.

"Now, my poor man," said the magistrate, addressing him in a fatherly persuasive voice, "in order to clear yourself of complicity in this heinous crime you must give us some clue as to where this man Hung Fong is most likely to have secreted any treasonable papers.

"Come," he added in a sterner voice, seeing the prisoner hesitate, "time is precious, and a terrible example will be made of you if you trifle with or deceive us."

"I think, my lord," replied Hung Hoi, "that a paper of some importance has been hidden near the western wall of Mr. Hung Fong's pleasure grounds, though I am not positive."

"Ha!" said the Taotai, "we shall soon get to the bottom of this conspiracy."

Then, without taking any notice of his perjured victim, he conversed in an undertone with How Seng Wui, who soon afterwards had the prisoner removed back to gaol.

CHAPTER XIV

THE ARREST OF HUNG FONG

Cheng was very much missed by his family, and his worthy father looked proudly and hopefully forward to the time when he would come home crowned with fresh laurels. Luh-hwa also missed her brother very much, for he had always been her faithful hero and champion; and there was yet another whose memory she secretly cherished with such hopeless constancy that there was something truly divine in it: for she could not rationally expect to ever again see that brave and handsome young foreigner who came from a "far isle in the great western sea."

Often in the long sultry days of summer she would sit in a shady arbour by the still waters of the lake in her father's grounds and ponder upon those short dream-days, when a new and indescribable light, which beatified and irradiated all things, was kindled in her inmost heart. However, she was not the only one who harboured a forlorn love, for a little distance away poor Ah Lee, the Taotai's daughter, counted the slowly-passing days and conjured the whimsical fates with a name which she dare not reveal.

The affairs of Lien were in an unprosperous condition and caused Mr. Hung Fong much sorrow and anxiety; for he had always taken a keen and active interest in the welfare of the city, and there appeared to him little prospect of the dark and gloomy situation being improved while Shun Ming and his mercenary satellites held the reins of government. Moreover, he had suffered such severe monetary losses through the insatiable greed of this mandarin vulture, that he had been obliged to declare his inability to further respond to His Excellency's frequent calls upon his purse. Nevertheless, he was always ready and willing to promote any necessary and legitimate undertaking; but his private benefactions were performed secretly and unostentatiously, for the Chinese have a strong aversion to making known their charitable deeds, as they firmly believe that by seeking notoriety in such a manner they would debase themselves and offend the gods.*

All the members of the respected Hung family residing in and around Lien were ashamed and horrified when they heard of the intrigues and imprisonment of their unworthy relative, Hung Hoi, whom they had repeatedly tried to reclaim from his evil ways; moreover, they felt that his sinister actions might have far-reaching effects, particularly if the unscrupulous Taotai pleased to magnify the crime and try the conspirators for treason instead of disorderly conduct and larceny, a thing which had often been done under far less provocation.

Hung Fong loved his home and family, and nothing pleased him better than to throw aside all

* In this respect certain European nations might do well to borrow a leaf from the Chinaman's book.

mind, as if by magic art, the thought late had haunted her, and sing and sweet vivacity, her melodious voice often inducing people to congregate on the high wall, which enclosed the garden, as if entranced. But Cheng's vacant place was like a little cloud to at times pass over the face of that united family, and his name was on their lips.

"We may soon have a letter from Mr. Hung Fong, during one of the moments when they were sitting in the garden and the sun was casting its last gleam around them; and, while he spoke, his hope lighted his manly face as his words fell upon a female servant excitedly hurrying him with a letter in her hand.

"Oh, master!" she cried breathlessly, handing him the missive, "the inner court-yard soldiers, and the mandarin in charge have ordered this to be immediately delivered into your hands."

With grave misgivings, Hung Fong

grounds in order to ascertain whether there are any treasonable papers concealed therein; and I must command you to accompany those whom I have deputed to perform this duty, in order that you may be present in the event of any such discovery being made. My officer has a warrant, duly endorsed by His Excellency the Tao'ai and myself, which empowers him to make the necessary investigations and to arrest any person or persons whose liberty constitutes a menace to the peace and welfare of the city which it is our bounden duty to maintain.

(Signed) How SENG WUI,
Magistrate of Lien.

"Let them search!" exclaimed Hung Fong with righteous indignation. "I am no traitor!"

Turning to the ladies, who were much alarmed, he asked them to withdraw to their apartments, and then proceeded to the second court-yard, at the front entrance of which he was met by a petty mandarin who flourished with an air of great responsibility the all-important warrant which the merchant scanned with ill-concealed contempt.

"Sir," he said with manly dignity addressing the officer, "no obstacle will be placed in your way, so pray proceed at once with your investigations: for I harbour no treason and am guilty of no crime."

"That remains to be seen," answered the pragmatical mandarin, with bombastic insolence and disdain, calling upon his men to follow him, and entering the nearest building, which they proceeded to rummage in a most annoying manner, overturning furniture and giving as much trouble as possible.

From room to room they went, insulting the servants and carrying confusion everywhere, Mr. Hung Fong's remonstrances being utterly

disregarded and often answered with threatening and abusive language. It was evident, however, by the rapidity with which they conducted their search, that they did not expect to find anything indoors, this part of the programme being only carried out in order to impart a look of genuineness to the proceedings. The exasperated merchant was not sorry when they turned their energies to the grounds, which they hastily inspected, wantonly trampling flowers under foot and tearing down shrubberies until they came to the western wall of the garden belonging to the ladies. Here they began to closely scan every foot of ground, Mr. Hung Fong following their movements with astonishment and indignation not unmingled with apprehension, for he began to suspect foul play.

He was endeavouring to prevent one of these rascally intruders from treading upon some prized plants when the officer roughly clutched him by the sleeve.

"Ha! What have we here?" he said with malicious triumph, pointing to a roll of paper which a soldier picked up and handed to him; and an expression of devilish glee came into his face as he eagerly unrolled and perused the document which was none other than the one thrown there by Hung Hoi.

"By the Great Kwang, here's rank treason!" he vociferated, thrusting the paper before Hung Fong's face which flushed with anger and resentment as he scanned the first sentences and observed that his own name had been affixed at the end.

"I swear I have never seen that paper before!" he cried, vehemently stamping his foot. "It is a

forgery, and the work of some cowardly and malicious conspirator, and has been placed here for the purpose of dragging to the ground an innocent man."

"A very plausible excuse, Mr. Hung," sneered the official; "and, in order that you may exculpate yourself without delay, I will ask you to accompany me to the yamen."

"What base-minded infamy is this?" demanded the honest merchant, towering in his wrath high above the magistrate's cullion. "I am no renegade who lives by knavish deeds!"

"Seize and handcuff this traitor!" shouted the officer, and in a moment the yamen wolves fell upon their prey.

But Hung Fong was not the man to calmly submit to this indignity in his own grounds, and a fierce struggle ensued, more than one rascally "brave" falling before his strong arm. Hearing that their beloved master was in danger, the faithful Hung retainers gathered around him and fought with desperate courage, many of them being mortally wounded in the encounter. Doors were broken down and gates smashed as the struggling mass surged from one court-yard to another, the noise becoming so great that the whole city was soon stirred; and, as the news spread, soldiers and clansmen rushed to the fray. Above the swaying multitude Hung Fong's manly form could be seen as he wielded, with the fury of despair, a broken rifle which he had torn from one of his assailants.

Never before in that peaceful city had such a fight taken place, for the good rice merchant was beloved and venerated by all, and he and they

a large number of well-armed soliders who brought into the city at the dead of night and quartered in the two yamens.

Soldiers and citizens poured from every gate, and soon the sharp crack of muskets rang above the terrible din, and the dying were heaped round the merchant's door. Then darkness closed in upon this scene and at length Hung Fong and his valiant sons were overpowered by the superior strength and armament of their opponents; and as his captors led him away, he gave a last look of hopeless sorrow towards the home he had spent so many happy years. Then with an unbending dignity he turned and stalked through the gathering gloom, between dead and armed men, his chains clanking at each step, his clothes hanging in shreds. And behind him a mournful procession trailed the few of his servants and staunch clansmen who had survived that final struggle for liberty. But he walked more like a conqueror than a captive, and his heart was torn with anguish and he knew he was a doomed man, his step was unflinching and dauntless, and his honest face quailed not.

executed, so that there was room in the gaol for the little band of brave men who had thrown in their lot with the good merchant.

Severneck was standing, lantern in hand—for it was now dark—in readiness to receive the prisoners; and a grim smile played upon his villainous face as he caught sight of Hung Fong and thought of the possible “squeezes” he might extort from this rich man’s family.

“Welcome, Mr. Hung Fong,” he yelled out, as the soldiers handed over to him their captives. “Yours is a lucky first-foot, and I hope that you will be comfortable here.”

“Unhand me, varlet!” said Hung Fong in a commanding voice, and with a glance of loathing contempt, as the gaoler took hold of him by the arm to lead him to his cell.

“Hai ya!” roared the impudent scoundrel, opening a barred door and pointing to the filthy interior. “You will be more polite, my friend, after you have rested your well-fed carcass in this snug little parlour for a few days. Perhaps you will be pleased to hear that your honest cousin Hoi is comfortably lodged over yonder.

“See,” he added, “there is a nice bucket of clean water there and a bowl of cold boiled rice; so pray make yourself quite at home, and eat as much as you please.”

After unburdening himself of some more jeering remarks, Severneck locked and bolted the door of the cell and went off to look after the other prisoners who were subjected to very rough treatment.

Hung Fong paced up and down his cell in a fever of bitter anguish and indignation, for he felt

positive that Shun Ming had done him this great wrong in order to spoil his good name and rob him of his hard-earned fortune. Moreover, he was thinking about his dear ones at home, and of his absent son, and was wondering what would become of them, and whether any ill had already befallen them. Sometimes his thoughts would almost drive him mad with anger, and he vainly tried to wrench asunder the thick chains which weighed him down; but when he did this they only cut the deeper into his flesh and gave him intolerable pain.

Being at last worn out with mental and physical fatigue and suffering, he cast himself down upon some straw in a corner of the cell and fell into a deep sleep from which he did not awake until about nine in the morning, when Severneck brought him a bowl of coarse rice and some watery tea. He ate a little of the rice and drank some of the tea, and then tried to clean and tidy himself, which was not easy to do since there was only a little dirty water in a bucket, and his clothes were in tatters.

Presently a guard of soldiers came into the prison yard and formally demanded Hung Fong who was taken to the court-house, which was closely guarded by an imposing array of Black-banner troops and Tartar cavalry, the latter having only arrived that morning from Chao-tchou, a large city some fifty miles to the eastward of Lien. The interior was likewise full of armed men and official servants, and the Taotai and magistrate were presiding in all the Oriental splendour of power and affluence, their titles and offices being proudly borne aloft by smirking dependents.

With head erect and unfaltering step, Hung Fong advanced towards the tribunal, his eyes being fixed upon his judges, who did not meet his penetrating gaze, but appeared to be very busy examining certain papers which lay before them.

Not of his own free will did the stalwart merchant prostrate himself before the seat of Justice, but he was roughly forced to the ground where he remained in a kneeling posture, his legs and arms being closely pinioned to prevent him from rising.

As the prisoner was able to speak in the Mandarin dialect, the services of the interpreter were dispensed with, and in a sharp, quavering voice How Seng Wui read out the charge, which accused one Hung Fong, a citizen of Lien, of devising and elaborating a treasonable plot to rob the treasury and overturn the local government, whereby many peaceful servants and subjects of His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor of China, had lost their lives or been maimed for the rest of their days. Then followed an exaggerated and almost wholly imaginary version of the conspiracy, coupled with a summary of recent events, which supplied the material for building a number of minor charges that were enunciated in tedious length and sometimes briefly commented upon by the Taotai, whose countenance exhibited a self-satisfied smile as he stole wary and cunning glances at the more noble being whom he had singled out as his prey.

After the charge-sheet had been gone through in detail, a statement, purporting to have been voluntarily written and signed by Hung Hoi, was read aloud. The wretched opium-smoker therein confessed that he had been incited by his cousin

Fong to join the conspiracy, and, being a poor man, had fallen into evil ways and—in return for services rendered in connection with the revolt—received various sums of money from the rice merchant.

"Prisoner," said the magistrate in a squeaky voice, "what have you to say with respect to these charges?"

"I say," cried Hung Fong, his face livid with just indignation, "that I am quite innocent, and that this is a foul and abominable intrigue to rob and ruin me!"

"Pray moderate your uncultured voice and language," said the Taotai, with an evil leer, "and with due lowness and reverence answer the questions which are put to you."

"I am no dog or criminal!" replied the exasperated man, "and I demand justice."

"And it shall not be denied you," said the magistrate in a subdued, cynical voice, making a sign to one of the bystanders, and then turning to his companion.

"If it please your Excellency," he said, "we will not bring our porcelain bowls into contact with this villain's earthen jar; his obtuse mind can only be moved with hard things, and the bamboo will appeal to his dull senses with greater force than gentle or eloquent words."

Shun Ming signified his assent by a lordly inclination of the head, and the prisoner's hands were cruelly flagellated. Nevertheless Hung Fong bravely and silently underwent this unmerited punishment, though great tears of soul-stricken grief and wounded pride fell from his fearless eyes.

"Now answer me, prisoner," said the Taotai. "Do you deny that from time to time you gave

your cousin Hoi sums of money varying from four taels to one hundred?"

"I do not deny that," replied Hung Fong, "for he was an opium-smoker, and often in such distress that out of compassion for one of my own kindred, and in order to keep him from actual beggary, I frequently assisted him."

"And did you not send him food and drink when he was in prison and charged with a capital offence?" inquired the magistrate with a side glance at his colleague.

"I do not contradict that either," retorted Hung Fong with a glance of scorn at those mean-minded men. "I have a heart which is at least humane, and can feel for the sufferings of others, and I am not ashamed to acknowledge such faults as these."

"Though you object to suffer for them," sneered How Seng Wui, adding in a stern voice, "it is no use endeavouring to whiten your guilt, for, as the proverb says: 'Bury a body in the snow, and in time it will surely be discovered.'"

Further questions were put to the prisoner, who answered them in a straight-forward manner, emphatically denying any knowledge of the crime imputed to him, and maintaining his upright and independent demeanour. This so enraged his crafty and unscrupulous judges that they had him tortured by squeezing his ankles together until they nearly broke. Yet no word or cry for mercy escaped the agony-bitten lips of their victim, who only continued to declare his innocence and stoutly defend his integrity.

It must have been a terrible sight to witness this worthy and generous man's sufferings, and his intrepid, though hopeless, struggle against the



base-hearted persecution of those venal officials, who only wished him dead that they might divide his wealth, and rob his children of their patrimony.

After the trial had proceeded for some hours, the Court adjourned until the morrow; and, with a glance full of dark and vindictive meaning towards the exhausted prisoner, Shun Ming rose and, with the magistrate, left the chamber.

Hung Fong was escorted back to the prison under a strong guard, but, owing to the brutal treatment to which he had been subjected, in order to break his spirit and extort an admission of guilt, he could only limp slowly along, and at times had to clutch the arms of those nearest him to save himself from falling.

On being handed over to Severneck, he was taken to a cell which was smaller and dirtier than the one he had last occupied. As the door was opened and he was thrust in, his gaze rested upon the emaciated form of a man, who was seated upon the mud floor with his back propped up against the wall, and whose eyes seemed fixed upon him with an unearthly stare.

With an exclamation of horror, Hung Fong stood aghast and trembling, for he was confronting the lifeless corpse of his miserable cousin Hoi. His death seemed ominously suspicious, and by all appearances the poor wretch had been done to death by poison, for his tongue was swollen and protruded from the mouth, and there was an expression of intense agony upon his shrunk face.

There was something so hideously diabolical in the fact of the body having been placed in that position, and in his being shut up with it—shut up face to face with the remains of the weak mortal

who had betrayed him—that Hung Fong staggered beneath the cowardly and truculent blow, while his anger and superstitious awe caused him to loudly cry to Heaven for vengeance, and then to sink in a swoon upon the ground.

He must have remained for some time in an unconscious state, his mental and physical prostration no doubt helping to prolong the period of torpor, for when he regained his senses, the corpse had been withdrawn and the day was fast waning.

It all seemed to him like a horrible nightmare: the sudden transition from luxurious comfort and happiness to abject misery and starvation; the racking torture of mind and limb; the infamous cruelty and injustice of his incarceration and trial; and, to crown all, the awful fate of his cousin.

Seating himself upon a block of wood he thoughtfully reviewed the events of the past few days, and the more he meditated upon them the more firmly convinced he felt that Hung Hoi had been under such constraint that he had been forced into accusing him, probably under promises of speedy release, and had then been murdered so as to effectually hide all proof of the Taotai's treachery.

Darkness had fallen and Hung Fong was still absorbed in contemplation when the door of his cell was thrown open, and to his joy and surprise, Mr. Wong Ah-chih entered, carrying in his hand a lantern.

"My dear Mr. Wong!" he cried, in a voice which quavered with emotion. "What brings you to this horrible and dangerous place?"

"Speak not of that, my poor dear friend," answered the good old man, tears of sympathy welling up in his eyes; "it was with great difficulty

from which we citizens shall never recall know that you are innocent."

For a few moments poor Mr. I self-possession forsook him and, with breaking dissolution of a noble spirit his great choking sobs with those of his friend. Then, with a visible effort, he regained himself and recovered his composure.

"My own trusty friend and adviser, laying his hand affectionately upon my shoulder, "it truly lightens my load to have the respect and commiseration of a worthy man as you; and I have much to tell you which lies very near to my heart.

"As you are aware," he continued, "I am innocent of the reckless actions of my unfortunate cousin Hoi, who is dead in this prison, and who has evidently been a victim to the wiles of his captor, the latter used him to his own devilish purpose and sealed his mouth with the seal of death."

Mr. Hung now proceeded to brief details of his arrest and trial.

"I have heard," said Mr. Wong, "two before your arrest. your cousin Ho

Fong, excitedly limping up and down the cell. Then, composing himself, he went on: "But the knowledge of this will little avail me, for where there is no honour there can be little justice; so let us not waste time, my dear friend, in lamenting my fate, since it may be the last time we shall meet in this world.

"I hear," he continued, "that those of my clan who have not been killed have, with the exception of my brother Ling, fled from the city."

"That is true," said Mr. Wong, "and your good brother and his family have, for the present, found safe refuge in my house, and he begged me to convey to you his heart-felt condolences."

"May Heaven reward your noble and unselfish generosity!" exclaimed the prisoner, grasping the old man's hand, and pressing it with affectionate fervour.

"And pardon my presumption in mentioning so inviolable a matter," said Mr. Wong; but I hear that your most estimable wife, Mrs. Lee-fah, endeavoured to gain admittance to you last night, but the gaoler was so insulting and extortionate that she could not effect an entrance."

"Heaven guard my loved ones!" breathed Hung Fong, in a low, earnest voice, involuntarily clasping his own hands in the agony of the thought.

"The gods be thanked that you have come to me, and that I am not deserted in these days of tribulation," he continued, "for my dear Cheng must know how his father perished, and by whose hand he fell."

"Among other little things," said Mr. Wong, fumbling in the pocket of his jacket, "I have brought you writing materials so that you may

indite a letter to your dutiful son; and be sure I will do all that is possible to save, advise and protect my old pupil; for I love him as a son."

"Take him to your heart and be a father to him," said the prisoner, thankfully receiving the appliances for writing, also some little creature comforts the kind-hearted old gentleman had provided from his slender purse.

Placing a sheet of paper upon the flat part of the block which served as a seat, and preparing the ink, he knelt upon the floor and wrote a letter to Cheng in which he simply and truthfully told him of his persecution; of the manner in which his trial was proceeding, and the little prospect there was of his surviving the hatred and treachery of Shun Ming; and finally exhorted him to believe in his father's innocence and remember him; to protect his family, and, above all, to practise virtue and learning and be loyal to his clan and country.

Then folding and addressing the missive he enclosed with it a gold ring which he took from his finger, and handed the envelope to Mr. Wong who carefully secreted it upon his person and promised to deliver it faithfully and at the earliest opportunity. They now took leave of one another, and the aged scholar slowly and sorrowfully went his way, feeling sure that he should never again see his dear friend and patron.

When he had gone, Hung Fong drank some of the wine and ate a little of the cake which this true-hearted old friend had provided him with, and, being somewhat refreshed, laid himself down upon some straw in a corner of the cell, and as much as possible composed his mind, in order to recuperate his strength for the trials and sufferings of the

morrow. For some time his mind was disturbed by ebullitions of grief and anxiety, but at length he fell into a deep sleep which lasted until the dawn of another calm and sunshiny day.

The sun was just rising when he awoke. The air was calm and fresh, and a Heavenly stillness prevailed, being only broken by the melodious songs of birds.

Going to the barred front of the cell, he pensively watched the glorious mingling of colours in the eastern sky.

As the prisoner gazed upon this thought-inspiring scene, and his eye marked the gorgeous panorama of changing light, while "morn came furrowing all the Orient into gold," a strange presentiment that he was witnessing the last sunrise of his life, caused him to fold his hands and pray to the great God of Heaven and earth to be with him and to watch over his beloved family. And, while he prayed, a feeling of sublime and transcendent peace entered into his troubled mind, lifting him, as it were, away from those squalid surroundings into a soul-world of his own; and he felt glad and even proud that he could go fearlessly forward over that great Borderland and, with a clear conscience and clean record, enter into the company of his illustrious forefathers.

CHAPTER XV

A DOUBLE TRAGEDY

At the usual hour a large guard of Tartars conveyed Mr. Hung Fong to the court. As before, Shun Ming occupied a seat beside the magistrate with whom he was in close conference when the prisoner entered ; but what most attracted the attention of the latter, and caused his daughter's breast to give a mighty heave, was a red cushion which lay upon the tribunal, and upon which rested a document that bore two large characters. It was his death sentence ; and he was forced to kneel before it.

"Prisoner," commenced the magistrate, looking askance at him, and then giving a sidelong glance around the court, "His Excellency, the viceroy, and distinguished Taotai of Lien, and myself, have exhaustively examined and considered the statements you have made in your defence, and also those of the witnesses mentioned in your

your favour, or any just reason why you should not suffer the full penalty of the law for your misdeeds. It therefore only remains for you to make a full confession of your crime and throw yourself upon our mercy."

"I reiterate that I have nothing to confess," said Hung Fong, looking his judges in the face and raising his arm, being thoroughly roused and exasperated at this indictment; "and, were I guilty, I might just as well put my head into the gaping jaws of a tiger, as to expect any clemency from you, who have unjustly dishonoured my name, and, by your infamy, destroyed the peace and prosperity of this city!"

"Silence, traitor, lest your limbs be rended!" said the Taotai, shaking his finger menacingly at him.

"My life and my honour are at stake!" retorted Hung Fong; "so with reference to the alleged statements of witnesses, and to the finding in my grounds of the document upon which your charges are based, I demand to know what trustworthy evidence, of an incriminating nature, you have against me, and why my cousin Hoi was made to stand in a cangue outside the western wall of my residence, and near the very spot where the said document was found."

"We have the authentic evidence of your unfortunate cousin Hoi, and that of the officer who discovered the treasonable paper, which was secreted in the grounds of your house, near which we thought it advisable to place your cousin as a timely warning to his relations," replied the magistrate, adding sharply, "and you admitted having supplied the man Hung Hoi with money, and also,

ted, "I have done what I could to keep absolute penury and starvation."

"Very excellent motives," sneered the man with a crafty smile; "you very naturally with the proverb, that 'if a little cash expended, much cash would not come'—your treasury was ransacked; or, in other words, were 'casting a pebble to allure a gem.'"

The magistrate now cross-examined the man at great length, but the latter kept to his statements and protested his innocence. That it was impossible to drive him into it, or shake his determination to contest his innocence to the bitter end, the order was given to inflict on him one of the most cruel and hideous tortures of torture.

He was seized by six strong ruffians and carried into a heavily-framed chair, to which he was securely fastened with strong grass-ropes, his arms being bound as far as the elbows, the rest of the limb free though helpless. Two men held his hands out, with the palms up, while two others slowly drove thin and sharp pieces of bamboo between the nails and

overspread the face of Shun Ming, as he gloated over his victim's misery; and not until all the fingers of the poor man's bleeding hands had been torn in this manner did he cause the yamen-officers to desist.

"Prisoner, confess your crime, and sign this just sentence!" said the magistrate in a shrill voice.

But Hung Fong remained mute and obdurate; so, finding that they could not wring a confession from him, the only alternative was to make him sign the death-sentence, as by doing this he would acknowledge the justice of it.

The prisoner was now unbound from the chair, and into his lacerated fingers a brush, filled with vermilion-coloured ink, was forced and held into position.

"Heaven be my witness: I am innocent!" he cried out, struggling with the wretches who had hold of him, and were dragging him towards the tribunal.

But voice and strength were of little avail against these hell-hounds; and as the magistrate pushed forward the red cushion which held the fatal document, Hung Fong's unwilling, though powerless, hand was forced to trace the characters which composed his name. The bent, bleeding fingers were pressed by strong hands over the brush and then down to the margin of the document, upon which drops of blood fell.

One straggling, unshapely character was thus drawn, and the poor frantic prisoner made a last desperate attempt to wrench his arm free, and he and his brutal tormentors fell to the ground, dragging the cushion with them.

"Weak fools!" cried the excited magistrate,

leaning over the tribunal and clutching at the cushion and death-sentence; "get this traitor up!"

The claw-like hands of many hirelings, who were accustomed to these scenes, gripped the manly form of the merchant and, hissing curses in his ear, they once more bended him forward and drew his lacerated hand down upon the blood-stained document. Another rude character was compulsively made, and the signature was complete.* Then the prisoner was momentarily released.

With a terrible cry of heart-broken despair, he staggered back, and, falling on his knees like one whose spirit was crushed, held out his trembling bleeding arms in an attitude of supplication.

"Spare my son! Spare him!" he pleaded wildly; and then looking aloft he cried out to Heaven to defend his kindred.

"Such mercy would be ill-advised," said the Taotai, with a cynical smile; "for, as the Great Master says, 'if the roots be left, the grass will grow again.'"

But this last shaft did not reach its mark, for the poor mangled victim of Manchu-Tartar injustice and extortion had swooned away; and, as he fell forward, the magistrate rose to his feet and addressed the court.

"Having been tried and convicted of treason, which is a capital crime, the prisoner Hung Fong

* In September, 1890, when the author was staying at the treaty port of Amoy, South China, a trial took place in the Chinese magistrate's yamen in which the mode of procedure was almost identically the same as that pursued in the Hung Fong trial; only in that instance the unfortunate prisoners, who underwent severe torture, were taken from the knee-rack in a fainting condition and dragged forward to the tribunal. Then the yamen-runners dipped each prisoner's finger in the ink and held it out to sign, or blotch, the death-sentence, which rested upon a red cushion.

is to be executed on the fourth day of the seventh moon, which is to-morrow," he said reading the sentence; "and, in accordance with the laws of the country, his property shall be confiscated by the Government, and his family dealt with in such manner as we, His Imperial Majesty's officers, shall hereafter decide upon and deem expedient for the safety and well-being of the State."

Thus terminated the mock trial and condemnation of an innocent and honourable man, by no means an uncommon occurrence in a Chinese court of law, where extortion and corruption of every conceivable nature influences the conduct of all those officials—and their name is legion—who take advantage of a Government which allows its servants inadequate salaries, yet gives them authority to obtain unlimited emoluments.

The news soon spread throughout Lien that the good merchant had been sentenced to death and public feeling ran high, great indignation being felt against the dastardly crime perpetrated by the officials. Since Hung Fong's arrest, his wives and daughter had been kept in a state of perpetual alarm and anxiety, and, fearing insult and intrusion from the yamen people and soldiers, had shut up the front part of the house and taken refuge in their own apartments, where they were waited upon and kept informed of all that transpired outside by their devoted amahs.

When the dread tidings came that the master had been condemned to decapitation, and that his estate was forfeited to the Government, a scene of indescribable anguish and confusion ensued. Poor Luh-hwa fainted away in the arms of her mother, who tearfully attended to her, while Mrs. Ah-choi

their tears with those of the two gentle
whose hearts seemed broken by this crushing

It was late in the afternoon when full particulars
of this terrible calamity reached the household
was well known that next morning it was to be
taken possession of, and that the family was to be
either thrown into prison, or transported to some
distant province.

When the first passionate outbreak of grief
had somewhat abated, Mrs. Hung Lee-fong
was a brave and faithful wife, made preparation
for another endeavour to see her poor husband
that she might comfort and take leave of him.
To all appearances she was now calm and composed,
and a smile, which seemed to have some
pride and even triumph in it, at times settled
her pale face as she moved about the household
assisting the others to make ready for a
flight from the city. When all was completed
and arrangements had been made for her to go,
await the party outside the southern gate.
At night, she dressed herself in her costliest
robes and sat down and wrote a letter

machinations of the Taotai, Shun Ming, and the magistrate, How Seng Wui, your poor father was recently arrested and tried for being concerned with our thriftless relative, Hung Hoi, in causing a riot, and in attempting to loot the treasury. Hung Hoi was really the true culprit, and was assisted by some profligate friends of his, but he was compelled to denounce your honourable father as a traitor, that we might be robbed of our estate, and was then thrown back into prison where he immediately afterwards succumbed under suspicious circumstances. It is needless to say that your good father is innocent of any crime or misdemeanour, yet he has been unjustly condemned to suffer decapitation, with confiscation of all his property.

"May the gods grant that he may not suffer this indignity. I am now about to go to him and be with him until the end; for, as you know, the place of a dutiful wife is beside her lawful husband, and the prospect of being able to somewhat alleviate his sufferings, and of showing my gratitude for his loving kindness and protection at all times by journeying with him into the regions of rest and happiness, fills my heart with contentment.

"My well-beloved son, you will not meet your good father and mother again upon earth, but I know you will remember them in your prayers; that you will not forget their advice, or cease striving after virtue and learning; and that you will ever be a fond and faithful brother and guardian to your dear sister, Luh-hwa, to whose gentle care I am committing this letter, since she and Ah-choi are to leave Lien this night, it being dangerous for them to remain here longer. They will journey to Canton, where, by the blessing of Providence, you and she may be united, and, with your step-mother, live in peace and unity. From them you will learn all details of this terrible calamity, which has broken our hearts and home, branded our kindred as felons and fugitives, and given to the fatherless children of heroes and patriots a birthright of penury and dishonour.

"In order that the Tablets of our venerated forefathers shall not be desecrated or fall into the ruthless hands of Manchu-Tartar tyrants and infidels, I myself shall convey them from the ancestral hall to the City Temple, and hand them over to the safe keeping of Lo Feng Liu, the chief priest.

"Farewell, dear Cheng, and may the gods continually watch over you and direct your heart in virtue, diligence and understanding, and make your life shine with high and creditable works; and this is the last earnest wish and prayer of your true and devoted mother,

"HUNG LEE-FAH."

Having enclosed the letter in an envelope, she sent for Luh-hwa, who was assisting Ah-choi to pack some of their clothing. The poor girl looked quite dazed and heart-broken as she entered the room.

"My dear Luh-hwa," said Mrs. Lee-fah in a kind, solemn voice, "if I loved my husband and my children less, I should not hold their fair name and honour dearer than my own humble life; but, as it is, my relationship to him and you enables me to avail myself of the privilege of being with him in the hour of departure from this sad world, and of accompanying him in his life's last journey.

"So I shall not go with you to Canton, though I am sure Ah-choi will do all in her power to take care of you until you meet your brother, to whom I have written this letter which you yourself must deliver into his hands."

Her voice now failed her, and with a stifled sob she embraced her daughter, who clung to her with frenzied despair and affection.

"Let me go with you to my poor father," sobbed Luh-hwa; "I am not afraid to leave this world: indeed, I would gladly do so rather than lose you and him."

"No, my Luh-hwa, that must not be," said Mrs. Lee-fah, caressing the young girl's dark hair. "We shall all meet again some bright day, but now you must live to brighten your brother's life; he must not be left quite alone in the world. So, dear, give him this letter when you see him, and tell him all."

They again embraced one another, in this manner silently taking leave, for their hearts were too full for further words. Then, as Luh-hwa slowly

and sorrowfully left the apartment, Mrs. Hung picked up a red bundle containing clothing and valuables and, throwing a large shawl over her head and shoulders, made her way to one of the back doors of the house, where a small sedan-chair was awaiting her. Stepping in, she directed the bearers to take her to the temple and, drawing down the front and side blinds, she sat back with a tearful smile upon her pale, handsome face.

The streets were comparatively deserted, and the silence of death and disaster seemed to have fallen upon that once prosperous city, blighting the lives and fortunes of its citizens, and drawing the very blood from its arteries. On turning a corner of the road to cross the market-place, the chair bearing Mrs. Hung passed the front entrance of her residence, which was separated by three barrier-like buildings from the ladies' apartments at the rear of the house, and here she noticed, with no little alarm, a guard of soldiers keeping watch.

When alighting at the temple, she told the chair-coolies to wait for her, and then ascended the steps to the main hall, which was in deep gloom, no one being there save a couple of priests who retired into the darkness of the interior as the veiled lady appeared. Moving to where Kwun Yam, the "Goddess of Mercy," presided in silent pomp, her head towering among circling clouds of incense, she placed some lighted joss-sticks and some food-offering upon the altar and, lighting a couple of red-coloured candles, prostrated herself before the benignant deity, invoking her aid and blessing, and consigning to her care the children she would never again meet on earth.

Rising and placing a liberal offering of money

upon the altar, she then went to the head priest to whom, on bended knee and with both hands, she gave the ancestral tablets, at the same time begging him to keep them safe until such time as they should be claimed by her son or his heirs. The priest, who was an old, white-headed man, spoke kindly and sympathetically to her, expressing his respect for the family and promising to place the tablets in a secluded place. He then knelt with her and prayed that the dark clouds might in time be dispersed from that unhappy city. After presenting him with a liberal gratuity, she quitted the temple and, entering her conveyance, at once set out for the gaol, which was close at hand.

On arriving there she gave directions for the chair to wait, and knocked upon a large door which was pierced by a barred window. Her summons was answered by a soldier to whom she gave a written message to the chief gaoler; but the man refused to admit her or deliver her message until he had extorted a heavy "squeeze." Then the door was held open and she was conducted to a small lodge, where she waited for some time. Presently Severneck came and led her to a somewhat larger building, where she was ushered into the presence of the head gaoler, who for some time refused to entertain the idea of allowing her an interview with her husband; but at length her increased offers of remuneration, which consisted of money and jewels to the amount of about two thousand taels, had the desired effect, and with apparent reluctance the greedy vulture took the heavy bribe and bade his assistant lead her to the condemned man's cell.

With beating heart and tottering step she

followed Severneck, who also managed to extort about fifty taels from her before he would open the door and admit her into the small chamber to which the prisoner had been removed that day. As she entered, she caught sight of her husband who was sitting upon a stool, apparently absorbed in thought; and when he raised his face and she tearfully rushed into his arms, a glance sufficed to reveal to her the change wrought upon him in the few days he had been there.

"My darling," he said with a heart-broken gulp of emotion, as he arose and pressed her to his breast, "this is no fit place for you; and yet may the gods be thanked that I am permitted to see you again."

For a few moments neither could speak, and he could only look upon her and then down upon his ragged clothes and heavy leg-fetters. There was, indeed, a marked alteration in that fine man, for his face was drawn and pallid, and his form seemed to have lost its dignity and to have bent beneath the burden of his trials. But now he pulled himself together and stood erect, and a warm, proud smile drove from his countenance the look of hopeless gloom which had settled there.

"My faithful Lee-fah," he said tenderly, "I can now go away happy, for I am innocent; but I will not be executed—that dishonour would be too great!"

"You speak well, my own dear Fong; and my soul shall bear yours company," she said, opening her bundle and taking from it the merchant's best silk clothes, at the same time throwing from herself the large shawl with which she was enveloped, and appearing to him in all her gorgeous attire.

"My brave Lee-fah! My only true wife!" he exclaimed admiringly, removing his own tattered garments and putting on the new ones, for his arms were loose.

Then, when they were both appalled alike, and in a manner befitting their station and integrity, they stood together with arms entwined and spoke in low, earnest whispers; and their words were too supernally solemn, too full of sublime meaning and affection, to be profaned by publicity. And, while they conversed, their faces grew bright with a faith and devotion which raised their souls to Heaven, and they looked more like a bride and bridegroom than those about to die. Then placing a couple of lighted joss-sticks in the ground, they knelt side by side and prayed long and earnestly to the Supreme Being who rules the hearts and destinies of all people.

Having concluded their devotions, Hung Fong rose to his feet; but, in accordance with custom, his wife remained kneeling before him until she had received his last blessing and had been assisted by him to rise.

"Go from me now, my Lee-fah," he said with infinite tenderness, again caressing her, "for the time has come when I must prepare to leave this abode."

"And my soul will travel with yours," she said, looking into his face with a last lingering gaze, and then turning quickly away and leaving his presence.

At the door of the cell she was met by Severneck, who slid back the huge bars which imprisoned the doomed man, and accompanied her to the outer entrance of the gaol. But before

allowing the heart-broken lady to depart, he demanded and obtained the very jewellery she was wearing.

Entering her chair she returned home, and, on passing the front of the house, noticed that it was still guarded by a number of "braves," who were lying about near the wall and in front of the main entrance, their arms being stacked in the road.

Having discharged the chair, which was only a hired one, she entered and locked the back door, and, while passing through the deserted garden, saw that the house was in darkness, except for a lantern hanging outside her own apartments. She was at last alone, for those whom she loved had fled from the ruthless hand of the destroyer, leaving their beautiful home for him to use and defile.

It was now past midnight, and a young, waning moon cast a faint light over the grounds and house, upon which an ominous silence had fallen, impressing the weary, forlorn woman with her utter loneliness and the desolation of her heart. She stood for some time looking sadly and reminiscently about her, large tears silently coursing down her once lovely face and dropping upon her breast, as these familiar surroundings called back to her mind bright and hallowed memories of a serene, happy life, in which she and her beloved husband and children had participated in heart-bound unity and contentment. But these were idle dreams: for the past would not come back again, and she stood alone on the deserted stage. Then, with a great moaning sob, she turned away and disappeared into the gloom of the untenanted house.

That night two of the noblest and most honour-

able citizens that had ever dwelled within the walls of that ancient city passed from the harrowing scenes and experiences of this mundane life; and next morning it soon became known throughout Lien that the worthy rice-merchant and his devoted wife had ceased to exist, and that the rest of his family had abandoned the palatial home and fled from the neighbourhood. He had strangled himself on the previous night in his cell, shortly after taking leave of Mrs. Hung, thus dying in a manner honourable to the traditions of his race, and escaping the double degradation of being executed by decapitation; while she had faithfully followed him to the grave by resorting to the usual Oriental method practised by women in swallowing opium. And that morning one of the Taotai's officers, who had been deputed to take possession of the estate, had found her lifeless body, clothed in her best attire, lying upon a couch in a secluded part of the deserted mansion.



CHAPTER XVI

THE CITY OF RAMS

After a somewhat leisurely journey of thirteen days, which had been made by boat from Ying-tin, coming down the Pekiang river, Montrose and his Chinese friends reached Canton one evening just before sunset, and entered the city by the Pak Moon, or North Gate, which stands directly to the westward of the eminence over which the city wall passes, and is one of the most important of the twelve outer gates, there being four others which lead through the wall dividing the old city from the new.

The three travellers and the faithful Ah Sam looked weary and travel-stained, though Cheng seemed delighted at having arrived at the journey's end, and looked about him with eager and intelligent interest, for he had often heard legends and descriptions of this wonderful provincial capital with its archaic temples, pagodas, and other far-famed institutions. By this time he and Montrose, and the young student, Tai Mo-kwah, had become fast friends, and it was with feelings of true regret that they at length came to a standstill outside a large Chinese hotel in Tseung Lan Kai Street, for the

purpose of parting, though Cheng, who had made up his mind to take a four days' holiday before commencing his final studies for the examination, promised to meet Montrose at eleven o'clock on the following day for the purpose of sight-seeing. Not so with poor Tai, who smiled sadly, and, when they asked him to join them, answered that his time was precious and his duty pressing, though he consented to stay with Cheng, as his guest, until the morrow, when he intended to try and obtain an audience with the Prefect of Kwang-chow-foo, who governed fourteen districts and acted in the capacity of chief magistrate.

Having left his friends, Montrose made his way to the Shameen where the European community dwells, which is situated in the neighbourhood of the western suburb of Canton, and is considered one of the most picturesque settlements in China.

He was fortunate enough to find that the lodgings he had formerly occupied during his stay there, and in which he had left much of his luggage, were vacant, so he soon made himself comfortable and enjoyed a hearty meal, though not before making the ablutions so necessary after a long journey in the Far East. Afterwards he seated himself upon a verandah at the rear of the house and, while enjoying a pipe, meditated upon recent events and watched the last rays of the declining sun gild the tree-surrounded pagoda of Macao Fort, and finally climb the purple hills of Blenheim Reach, and there in glory fade. The bullfrog's voice now joined in the drowsy chorus of night-songs which soon wooed the tired listener to the comforts of a downy bed ; and, although the mosquitoes were there before him, his slumbers were peaceful and refreshing.

Next morning at ten o'clock, Montrose set out for Ninth Ward Street, near which stands the celebrated Fan Lun Sze, or "Temple of the Five Hundred Gods," where he had promised to meet Cheng. The weather was fine, and the streets were filled with traffic: coolies carrying burdens slung on either end, or in the middle, of bamboo poles; public sedan-chairs, and large blue or green covered palaquins adorned with silken tassels and carried by four or eight bearers, the number varying according to the rank or wealth of the owner; and pedlars, lepers and blind beggars helped to form the motley though good-humoured procession which incessantly poured through the numerous thoroughfares.

On either side were shops in front of which long red or black signboards, bearing the name and trade of the proprietor and the grandiloquent designation of his house, were suspended above the pavement in such a manner that a moderately tall man was obliged to constantly stoop or dodge about and run the risk of bruising his head, or of overturning one of the many stalls which hamper the side-walks. These stalls are leased by the shopkeepers to petty traders whose shouts increase the din, above which is frequently heard the shrill cry of "*Hoo-ou too!*" (clear the way), as the approach of a high mandarin is heralded by a troop of ragged lictors with conical wicker-work hats, followed by petty officials on horseback, gong-beaters, whip and chain bearers, and armed "braves," who form the cortège and guard of the great *taipan*. Outside most of the merchant *hongs* large crocks of hot tea were placed for the convenience of poor people, this charitable custom being observed throughout the empire.

On nearing the aforesaid temple, Montrose saw Cheng waiting for him at a corner of the street. The latter was dressed in a long, yellow silk robe with a pale blue brocaded jacket, and looked very smart and handsome. After exchanging greetings, Montrose inquired after their travelling companion.

"Poor Tai," said Cheng sadly; "he came to my room early this morning and bade me good-bye, as he wished to see the chief magistrate, and, if possible, obtain his father's immediate release by offering to suffer in his stead."

"A most noble, though misguided purpose," remarked Montrose.

"His conduct is beyond human criticism," said Cheng, in a tone of mild rebuke; "and may the gods be with him and avert a double disaster."

"But I am glad to have met you," he added with a smile, "for your companionship is agreeable to me, and we have much to see that will instruct and interest us both."

Ascending the broad steps of the temple, they passed through a range of small chambers until coming to the Lao Hang Tang, or "Hall of Saints," a spacious and magnificent apartment in which five hundred images of deified Buddhist worthies were arranged in avenues. These idols were mostly composed of a particular kind of clay covered with highly-glazed gilt and were cleverly and often very artistically made, each having its peculiar posture and facial expression.

One effigy was fondling a wild beast which his beneficent influence had tamed and subdued; another saintly personage, during a supposed vigil in the wilderness, was being fed with fruit by a troop of monkeys which were clustered around him

or perched upon his shoulders; while other deities were deformed in various ways, one fanatical devotee having overgrown arms, the result of piously keeping them in an upright position for years.

Some of the idols were supposed to represent virtuous ministers and men of letters who had lived in bygone dynasties, and at one end of the hall was the deified image of the wise Emperor Kien-lung* before whom fragrant wood and joss-sticks were continually kept burning. Behind the monarch stood a triple statue of Buddha, and in the centre of the hall was a magnificent bronze pagoda about sixteen feet high and ornamented with bronze figures.

"Who is that terrible-looking image supposed to represent?" asked Montrose, pointing to a bull-headed monster.

"That is Tsung Kwei, whose image was placed by imperial decree in most of the temples throughout the land; but we never point at the gods, as it is not reverent to do so," replied Cheng, regarding the hideous effigy with some awe.

"It appears," he continued, "that about twelve hundred years ago, the Emperor of China saw a small, blue-coloured devil come into his palace one night and steal his flute (which was made of precious jadestone), and the Empress's perfume-bag, which he flew away with to the roof of the building. While he was resting there another blue-devil, though of gigantic size, with the head of a bull, and carrying a flaming sword, attacked and slew the other devil and restored the stolen goods, which he brought to the Emperor's bedside.

* Reigned A.D. 1736 to 1796.

disappeared; but the Emperor felt great pleasure and satisfaction in having been visited by so powerful and distinguished a person of the outside world, and at once paid an artist many pieces of gold to paint a picture of Tsung Kwang in his own description, and copies of it were sent to the chief sculptors throughout China.

Whether Montrose believed this story or not he did not venture to inquire. After passing through another hall, where there was a fine marble column about forty feet high, they left the temple and made their way towards the Tartar City. On passing along a fairly broad thoroughfare they came upon a Chinese puppet-show, well attended and surrounded by an open-mouthed crowd of children. Pausing for a few minutes to watch the performance which was exactly similar to our Punch and Judy* show, the dolls being well dressed and very cleverly manipulated by means of wires.

Being desirous of finding out something about the source from which this show was first introduced in the "Middle Kingdom," Montrose inquired of his companion.

"What is it?"

...

performance. "At that time a general named Mo-tung was besieging the city in question, and he happened to be possessed of an inordinately jealous wife named San-oh who, being fearful lest her husband should happen to meet a more prepossessing damsel than herself, always accompanied him on his warlike expeditions. This fact was well known to the defender of Peng who, being a shrewd and resourceful man, caused to be made a large wooden puppet of a woman whose limbs were moved by strings. This doll was dressed in beautiful robes and placed in a conspicuous position upon the wall of the city; and, when the amorous general came from his tent, its arms were raised as if in supplication, and he stood admiringly watching the figure. His wife chanced to appear upon the scene and, catching sight of the supposed woman standing upon the wall of the beleaguered city and apparently making signs to her husband, she became very jealous and caused the siege to be raised, being afraid that, in the event of the city falling into their hands, this bewitching damsel might prove a dangerous rival. In perpetuation of this clever stratagem, the *gong-chi-hae* came into existence."

On entering the Tartar City by the South gate, the two sightseers soon came to a large quadrangle in which stood the Bell Temple, a very ancient building, chiefly supported by the donations of military officers. Passing up a broad flight of steps and beneath a beautifully-sculptured archway, they entered a large hall, in the centre of which stood the supreme divinity of the Taouist faith. On either side were smaller places of worship containing numerous idols, before each of which

stood an incense brazier, an urn for burning silver paper and several candlesticks, also votive offerings in the way of food and drink.

"This is Chang Tau Leng, the 'Taouist Chief of all Demons'," said Cheng, inclining his gaze towards a curious effigy of an aged man who held in each hand a large sword with a corrugated blade.

"That immortal being," he continued, lighting and placing some joss-sticks before the idol, "lived at a time when the Kingdom of Wei was in the zenith of its glory. When about seventy years of age he obtained from a fairy some earth which he made into pills and swallowed, these causing his body to become imperishable. Immortality was thus attained and, when he had reached the ripe age of one hundred and thirty years, the great Lao-tsze, who founded the Taouist faith, appeared to him and, handing him a book containing all the secrets of magic art and two flaming swords, confided to his charge the demon kingdom. To those realms Chang Tau Leng at once repaired, rising in full view of all the people at midday, and he has since held that responsible office."

"I should imagine that it *is* a responsible office," observed Montrose, not daring to laugh in the presence of such sacred objects.

They were now joined by a patriarchal-looking priest, who offered to act as their cicerone, and conducted them to the most ancient part of the building which, together with some idols of great antiquity, had been at some period much damaged by fire.

"Here, where we are now standing," he said, in an impressive voice, staring down upon the

time-worn pavement, "is where, twenty centuries ago, five shepherds were suddenly transformed into rams; and on this very spot they were immediately afterwards changed into stone images. While this was taking place a loud voice was heard to proclaim that, so long as these supernatural objects were worshipped, the prosperity of the city would continue. I, myself, when quite a boy, saw those stone rams, which were of granite and about eighteen inches long; and, strange to say, after a fire which destroyed part of the temple, they suddenly vanished, and the city—which thus derived its sobriquet of 'The City of Rams'—has never had any luck since their disappearance."

The old man now led the way through a door, in front of which stood an ancient and dilapidated pile of sculptured masonry traversed by an archway, about twenty feet in height, and open in the centre, above which, from lofty rafters supported by stone columns placed on the top of the arch, hung an immense bell that was covered with curious designs and hieroglyphics; and beneath it was placed an iron censer in which sandalwood and other sweet-smelling woods were constantly kept burning as an offering to the spirit of the bell.

"This is the 'Interdicted Bell,'* and, as you will observe, is deprived of its clapper," said their guide. "It was cast over five centuries ago, in the early part of the reign of Hung Wu, and it was then predicted that a great calamity would befall the city should it ever be sounded. Many, many years ago, a high official, while visiting this temple, ordered one of the priests to strike the

* Its Chinese name is Kiu Cheung.

bell, and, immediately this was done, one thousand five hundred male and female children of Canton passed from this world. It is believed that some powerful spirit was annoyed or startled by the unusual sound and caused the calamity.*

"You will also notice," he added, "that the lower rim of the bell is badly damaged. This was caused over thirty years ago by a shot from an English man-of-war, when the foreign legions were bombarding the city."

Cheng reverently *kowtowed* to the bell and gave some money to provide incense for its in-dwelling spirit ; and then the amiable old priest conducted them to a secluded garden situated to the east of the main hall. In the centre of this enclosure was a pond of very clear water, on the red sandstone bottom of which was the shape of a large footprint which was believed to be the impress left by some powerful deity ; and at one end of the garden a flight of steps led down into a leafy retreat to the shrine of "Golden Flowers," where a goddess, like the Venus Genitrix of Rome, supposed to bless mothers with offspring, presided among choice flowers, being surrounded by statues of hand-maidens holding upon their knees one and sometimes two newly-born infants. All of the images had several pieces of red cord tied round their necks, these having been placed there in record of the wish of certain women worshippers who had besought the blessing of fecundity.

At the head of the enclosure stood a miniature

* Chinese children always wear small silver bells upon their hats and around their necks and wrists in order to avoid the bad influence of this malignant spirit.

joss-house tenanted by the mighty Kwang Tai,† the "God of War"; and in front of the image was an altar beside which were hung a large bow and sword.

"Here," said the priest, "the Tartar candidates for military promotion come to make sacrifices preparatory to going up for the examinations.

"They greatly fear and respect this deity," he continued; "for it is said that during the Taiping revolution the city of Chining-chow-foo was threatened by the rebels who were advancing to take it, and would have succeeded had it not been for the timely intervention of this powerful deity. With fiery face, long beard, and glittering helmet, he was then seen standing in the centre of a red star and leading his armed hosts to the support of the city; and the sight of this invulnerable warrior, and the terrific noise made by his soldiers, so alarmed the rebels that they fled panic-stricken from the field."

"The Taipings were not the people to run away from danger, but rather to court it," said Cheng haughtily. Then, turning to another priest who had just joined them, he proposed that they should all have lunch together at his expense, if they could find someone to procure wine and victuals.

His liberal offer was duly appreciated, and the holy men despatched a novice to the market, and then conducted their visitors to a shady grotto in which stood a black ebony table and several chairs. It was a pleasant place for a picnic, and one would have imagined that, instead of being in the heart of the city, it was far

† Kwang Tai first gained notoriety in A.D. 170, when he, with three other leaders, took an oath to live and die together in fighting the Yellow Turban rebels who caused the downfall of the Han dynasty.

away in a wild country, for on either hand were rocks covered with ferns, and crowned with thick vari-coloured foliage, through which only a few bright sun-rays found their way; while a stream of clear water trickled down the side of the ravine and entered a miniature lake.

"This is our secret den," said the elder priest with a contented smile. "Here we come to study and commune with nature, and to imagine ourselves hermits."

"This leafy retreat reminds me of the story of the Cave of Kwang-su-foo in Kiang-si," said Cheng, who was in a most agreeable mood. "If you, my friends, have not already heard the story, I will tell it while we are waiting for our rice."

"About nineteen centuries ago there lived in the province of Kiang-si a poor shepherd, named Chang-ho, whose only relative was an aged grandmother to whom he was most devoted. One day when he was wandering with his goats among the lonely mountains, he happened to seat himself near the cave in question, though he was quite ignorant of its existence, there being nothing to denote it save the smooth-faced rock. Presently he heard a voice say, 'Stone door, open to admit Mr. Kwong Kwi,' and, looking round, he saw a strange little man dressed in green approach the cave, which was now revealed to him by the movement of a large slab of stone, which swung outwards to admit the man, who was a genie, and remained open while he was inside."

"Hiding behind a tree Chang-ho waited and watched, and in about an hour's time he saw the genie come out of the cave, and heard him say, 'Stone door, close; Mr. Kwong Kwi departs.'"

Whereupon the slab closed of its own accord.

"Chang-ho's curiosity was much excited, and he went there regularly for half a moon, until he knew the exact time when the genie was likely to be absent, and also the words he used to open the magic door. So one day he determined to explore the wonderful cave and, summoning up courage, went to the rock and, repeating the formula, was delighted to see the huge door swing slowly and silently open.

"On entering the cave he was surprised to find that it was of immense size, and that its scenery was marvellously beautiful; and for some time he stood in spell-bound wonderment and admiration, gazing upon the fairy-like sights which surrounded him. Thinking he might discover some treasure he searched about, but, not being successful, returned home and related his adventure to his grandmother, who was deeply interested, and expressed a desire to accompany him to the cave, that they might explore it together. So next day they started for the mountains, and again Chang-ho effected an entrance to the cave, about which they wandered for some hours. After a time the young man lost sight of his aged companion and, having fruitlessly searched for her, came to the conclusion that she had already left the grotto, and forthwith went out, the stone door closing behind him.

"But the old lady was nowhere to be seen, and on returning home he found that she was still absent. The day was beginning to wane, and, in great dismay, he hurried back to the mountains and once more endeavoured to open the magic door. However, his words were of no avail, and,

in spite of all his efforts, the door did not open ; so, feeling alarmed and horrified, he flung himself down upon the ground and wept and prayed.

"Suddenly he heard footsteps, and, rising to his feet, saw the genie standing smilingly before him. The old man asked what was the cause of his lamentations, and the poor shepherd confessed the truth, at the same time imploring him to open the door and release his grandmother. But the genie stedfastly refused to comply with his request, and informed him that the cave required a victim, and that the old woman had been reserved for that fate. Furthermore, he said that her descendents would have great power over demons, though, had the victim been a male, one of his family would have each generation risen to princely rank.

"Chang-ho was somewhat relieved to learn that he was not actually to blame for his grandmother's disappearance, since her fate had been fore-ordained, and he at once returned home. In due course he married and, in accordance with the words of the genie, his first son became Chang-ho Tien-shaih, the "Master of Heaven," he being the first holder of an office which, as you know, is still in existence."

"My dear sir, your story was most amusing," said one of the priests, as Cheng concluded ; "and as our meal is now before us, we will endeavour to show gratitude to Heaven—for upon Heaven our daily food depends—and also to do justice to your generosity by eating well."

Montrose thoroughly enjoyed himself, and quite relished the Oriental tiffin, as did the priests, who were not accustomed to fare so sumptuously ; and Cheng was the life of the party, his dry humour and quaint stories being both clever

and interesting. At the end of the meal he and Montrose took leave of the jovial divines, who accompanied them to the entrance of the temple and bestowed upon them their blessings, in consideration of which the two sightseers gave them a liberal gratuity.

The rest of the afternoon they spent in buying curios and visiting the ruinous Tsing Wei Tsze pagoda, which was built in the Liang dynasty during the reign of the Emperor Wu Tai (A.D. 536), and at sundown they parted, both having spent a most pleasant day—a day which had further cemented a friendship which was destined, in the future, to materially affect the Englishman's life: for he had taken a great liking to the clever young student, who had a fascinating manner and striking personality.

It had been agreed upon between them that at ten o'clock next morning Cheng should meet Montrose at a certain place near the Sha-meen, and at the appointed time the latter arrived there, though only to find that his friend had not been punctual in his appointment. After waiting some minutes, he strolled towards the Chinese hotel where Cheng was stopping, and on nearing it observed that young gentleman perched upon the roof, gravely watching the movements of a large, bird-shaped kite which he was flying.

Montrose entered the house, and, ascending the stairs, which were ornamented with vases of flowers, climbed a ladder and, passing through a trap-door, gained the roof. Approaching the kite-flyer, he made apologies for his intrusion, and chided him for his forgetfulness.

With many bows and shame-faced looks, Cheng

made ample reparation, pleading in the most refined manner his ignorance of the hour and his foolish desire to try some kites he had bought to take home to his family, as his father and cousins were very partial to that recreation.

Conducting his visitor to the waiting-room, and having tea and cake brought to him, Cheng went to his room and expeditiously arranged his toilet, putting on a blue robe with a maroon-coloured jacket and embroidered fan-case. Then, rejoining Montrose, they left the house and made their way to the riverside, with the intention of visiting the far-famed Pun-tin-qua garden, Ah Sam, who accompanied them, being sent forward to engage a suitable boat, as their destination lay a few miles up the river.

Montrose made kind inquiries about the young man, Tai Mo-kwah, and learned that he had been unable to see the Prefect of Kwang-chow-foo, who was absent from the city; but he had gone out early that morning in order to try and see his unfortunate father, and to obtain an interview with one of the two district magistrates, whose yamen stood at the East Gate.

On arriving at the Shameen, they found that Ah Sam had hired, for three dollars, a small though comfortable house-boat with a lateen sail, and manned by a crew of five strong Kwang-tung men. They embarked at once, and the boat pushed off, but, as there was no wind, the crew shipped a large oar, or *yuhloa*, over the stern and sculled the craft along at a fairly good speed, the tide also favouring their progress.

Near the shore were moored the well-known flower boats, which are roomy vessels ornamented

with carved and gilded panels, the interior being highly decorated with coloured lanterns and festoons of flowers. These are hired by wealthy mandarins and merchants for feasts and pleasure parties, when deeply-rouged damsels entertain them with song and music.

The river presented an animated appearance, for all manner of craft glided to and fro. Small shoe-shaped sampans sculled by buxom young girls with pretty sun-tanned faces and bare legs, their head-gear consisting of a large straw hat or merely a dungaree cloth; large fish-shaped junks with eyes on either bow, two mat-sails as fins, and an immense rudder as tail; low-lying sharp-pointed *taimungs*, or war vessels, with antiquated guns grimly peering from their broadsides; and stumpy box-bowed passenger boats crowded with men, women and children and all manner of luggage. A medley of sounds, some not altogether unmelodious, greeted their ears as they passed up the river, for many of the junks were beating gongs and firing crackers to scare away any unpropitious spirits which might be hovering about, and the crews of others were singing drowsy chants as they *yuhloed* or hauled on ropes; while the saucy sampan-girls warbled merrily, rhythmically swaying their bodies and working their oars, or took up the chorus of a song sung by some labouring swain in the adjacent paddy-fields, where clumps of graceful bamboo, quaint pagodas, and curving roofs peeping from among variegated foliage, enhanced the sunny forenoon scene.

The *lowdah*, or captain, of the boat in which our friends were travelling, was an elderly man who had been a fisherman in his earlier days and, being

naturally superstitious, was deeply versed in the lore of sea and river.

"Ah, my masters," said he, seating himself on the bulwark of the boat, and smoking a bamboo pipe with a small brass bowl, "away up the river there is an island which rose up in a single night, and I will tell you how it came about. Some nine hundred years ago, there went to Tchao King-foo, the "Departmental City," a magistrate named Pao Man-chong, who was exceedingly clever in his line of business, and a very honest man. On arriving at the city he found that the officials were in the habit of making the poor people pay from the ink-stone quarries a great deal more tribute than was lawful, and that, after they had filled their purses, they sent the rest to the Court *taipans*, so as to curry favour with them. Well, Pao Man-chong would have none of this squeezing business, and only allowed the proper Imperial tribute to be levied; and the people prospered under his rule and loved him greatly. He gave such satisfaction to the authorities that, when his term of office expired, he was transferred to a high post in the capital; and, so honest was he, that when the people of Tchao King brought him presents, as a parting token of their gratitude, he refused to accept anything more than one inkstone, and even that he did not like to take lest people should think it was a bribe.

"While this good mandarin was travelling down the river there arose a typhoon during which a bob-tailed dragon passed over the water and threw the boat on its beam-ends.* Pao Man-chong thought

* The Cantonese say that very violent gusts of wind are caused by a *tun mai loong*, or bob-tailed dragon, passing along the river.

that the gods were offended with him for having accepted a present from the people he had governed, and he cast the inkstone into the water. Directly afterwards the wind died away, the boat righted itself, and an island—which is known to this day as Inkstone Island—rose up from the waters in the very place where the stone was thrown away.”

A gentle breeze now sprang up, and the *lowdah* went to assist in setting the sail and lowering the rudder, and the boat was soon gliding along at about six miles an hour. After passing the Fa-ti creek, where there are many warehouses for merchandise, and a beautiful garden, the course was changed, and, as Sulphur Creek was approached, a small, three-storied pagoda, embosomed among the foliage of water-cedars, made a good land-mark, and indicated the site of the pleasure-grounds, which originally belonged to one of the wealthy old-time hong merchants, named Pun-tin-qua.

The boat now entered the creek and landed its passengers a short distance from its mouth. Following a winding path which led past the pagoda, and over a frail artistic bridge that spanned a lake, the surface of which was covered with water-lilies, they found themselves in a veritable fairy-land many acres in extent. To the left of them stood an octagonal portico with a richly-gilded roof, made to represent an inverted lotus flower—the latter being held in great veneration by the disciples of Fo—and beneath its shelter stood two cleverly-sculptured figures, one of which was pointing towards a bright-coloured pleasure-boat moored near the western bank of the lake, which was fed by tributary streams that meandered among miniature landscapes.

They wandered through latticed pavilions, shady groves, and sylvan glens, and for some time neither Montrose nor Cheng spoke, for the former could not express the wonderment and appreciation in which he was lost; and the latter was reminded by these sights of his distant home to which his thoughts naturally reverted.

"After all," at length said Cheng, looking coldly around him, "in our own eye and heart there is no place like home—though we do not always realise this until we are absent, and in a manner estranged from it; and scenes which resemble the familiar ones of our native place awake within us old memories and affections for those who are dear to us, and those objects and localities with which they are associated. Do you often think of your home?"

"Yes," said Montrose, somewhat pensively, "and I can admire and sympathise with the feelings which prompt your words. And, for the reasons you have mentioned, I think it is good to sometimes withdraw oneself from home; moreover, by doing so we break through that shell of narrow-mindedness in which we are hatched."

They now seated themselves in a summer-house covered with jasmine, and Montrose lighted a cigar, while his companion politely kept him company by smoking a cigarette.

"One can picture," continued Montrose, "the great merchants of Canton sitting here with the supercargoes of the East India Company's ships, in the good old times of a hundred or more years ago, and sipping the much-prized beverage while they transacted business which sent shiploads of

tea, spices and rich silks to the far-away markets of the western hemisphere."

"Yes, it is a pleasant spot and, besides being full of memories, is no doubt a lucky one," said Cheng; "for, as you see, all the paths are circuitous, this tending to confuse and keep away evil spirits who, as a rule, like to follow broad and straight tracks. And in the formation of the miniature landscapes the wind and water influences seem to have been carefully attended to."

Having rested awhile they entered the Fountain Court, which used to be the summer retreat of the Pun-tin-qua family. It was a most romantic place, in fact quite a fairy palace, and consisted of numerous highly-decorated buildings with verandahs and colonnades, and separated by an expanse of clear water dotted with thickly-wooded islands upon which stood pagodas and observatories mounted on rockwork and reached by winding stairs.

The interior of each building was traversed by galleries and corridors supported by marble pillars, all being exquisitely sculptured, while the various rooms and halls were ornamented with stucco-work and brilliant frescoes, and the windows faced with fine tracery and fret-work, all being gorgeously painted.

"These halls are shorn of all the glory which belonged to the past," said Cheng, sadly gazing upon the deserted chambers.

"Where are the descendents of those who once graced this palace?" he continued somewhat bitterly. "Perhaps they were loyal to their country and have been stamped out of existence. Truly there seems no more glory left in this once

proud and mighty empire; for all that was most noble and beautiful in it has been condemned and exterminated to make way for the tyranny and extortion of the time-serving renegade and mercenary mandarin.

"Some day, my honourable friend," he added, turning to Montrose, and laying his hand upon his arm, "you will more thoroughly realise the truth of my words, and will see that the people of China do not require conversion to your faith, but the enlightenment of freedom. They are now robbed, deceived and oppressed, and are led to believe by their crafty task-masters that the foreigner is the cause of all their grief and poverty. We South-erners know better than this, though the down-trodden slaves of Central and Northern China are pitifully ignorant and, like water-buffaloes, are led by a ring in the nose."

"I do not doubt that there is much truth in what you say," answered Montrose a little coldly; "but I maintain that until your country people have found the true God—have found faith in Christ, and are able to look to Heaven for rest and redemption—they can never know real happiness or unity of purpose."

"Theological arguments are apt to cause dissension among the best of friends," said Cheng with a smile; "but, although it would pain me to hurt your feelings or lose your esteem by discussing so delicate a subject as our religious creeds, with all due deference I submit that the same idea of a godlike and omnipotent power or spirit inhabits and influences the hearts of all men, and underlies the outward signs of all forms of worship."

After spending some happy hours in wandering

about the grounds and conversing upon various topics, they returned to the boat and at sundown arrived at the Shameen. They were both hungry, not having had any food except a few rice-cakes and some tea since the morning, and Cheng gladly accepted an invitation to dine with Montrose, his staunch servitor also partaking of the Englishman's hospitality and enjoying a game of dominoes with some of his countrymen who were in foreign service; and thus another pleasant day passed.

CHAPTER XVII

THE RESCUE AND THE FLIGHT

Our two friends spent their time advantageously, and their friendship was further strengthened. Cheng took lodgings in a monastery, and gave his mind to study; and Montrose worked hard at the Chinese language, so that they saw very little of one another for some weeks. But one morning Cheng came to Montrose in a high state of excitement.

"I have passed my examination, and have come out third among the nine thousand competitors for the second degree," he said; and then his face became livid with anger and indignation as he added, "but my sorrow is nevertheless great, for it has just come to my knowledge that the chief magistrate has had poor Tai Mo-kwah thrown into prison with his father, and has ordered both to be executed."

This is very dreadful," said Montrose, grasping Cheng's hand; "but I am very glad to see you, and must sincerely congratulate you upon your success—you deserve it. I will see the British Consul, and find out if anything can be done for the poor fellow. What steps do you propose taking in his behalf?"

"You are very good," said Cheng earnestly, "and seeing you has given me fresh hope. I am now going to try and obtain an audience with the Imperial Commissioner, who is a powerful man; and, having testified his approval of my prose and verse essays during the examination, he may feel disposed to exert his influence in behalf of Mr. Tai or his dutiful son."

After walking some distance together, they separated, one going towards the British Consulate, and the other making his way to the Examiner-General's yamen, which was situated near the Kung Yuen, or Examination Hall, in the south-eastern corner of the city.

On arriving at the triple-gateway of the grandee's residence, Cheng—who was dressed in his best, with a gilt button of the second degree on his hat—summoned the door-keeper, to whom he gave his card and a gratuity. After a time he was admitted into the first courtyard, where he was met by a petty mandarin, who inquired into the exact nature of his business, and also the length of his purse, which was again opened before he allowed him to proceed inwards to the second barrier, where other "squeezes" were extorted, though some deference was shown to the one who, in spite of his youthfulness, had raised himself to a position far above the common herd. After waiting some minutes in an ante-room a *tingchai* escorted him into the presence of Cho Han-luh, the Imperial Commissioner, who was a tall, stalwart Kwang-si man, with a frank and benevolent countenance.

On bended knee Cheng respectfully stated his mission and petitioned His Excellency to take a

lenient view of the matter which he had presumed to bring before his notice and, if inclined favourably toward the prisoners, to use his beneficent influence to obtain the release of either the father or the son.

The Commissioner listened patiently, and a smile of paternal admiration crept into his countenance as he looked down upon the upturned face of the youthful suppliant.

"My young friend, your words move me to compassion," he at length said, kindly leading Cheng to a seat; "but I am afraid that it does not lie in my power to be of much service to you. If the prisoners, for whom you so eloquently plead, did not belong to either of the Kwang provinces, there might be a chance of rescuing them; but, as it is, I am afraid nothing can be done to save them, and that they will surely die at the appointed time, unless something extraordinary happens. However, I will at once see the Chief Magistrate, and will at least endeavour to obtain for you an interview with your unfortunate friends."

Cheng thanked his kind-hearted patron, who then dismissed him with strict injunctions to be careful what he did, and to return to him in an hour's time. So our young friend retraced his steps to the Shameen, and again met Montrose, whose look was anything but reassuring.

"I have just seen the Consul," he said, "and he informs me that he has no legitimate right to appeal to the Chinese authorities in behalf of our friends, and can only do so in the cause of humanity."

"There seems little hope of obtaining mercy, because the virtue of humanity is foreign to the vicious tyrants who rule over us and who desire to

exterminate the Cantonese root and branch," said Cheng, biting his lip, and impatiently tapping the ground with his foot. He then proceeded to relate to Montrose his conversation with the Imperial Commissioner.

"He is a good, honest man," he concluded, "but, being a Southerner, has many enemies, who would gladly have him degraded; and his yamen is a nest of griping Northern spies. The prison must be a thousand times worse."

"You shall not go to the prison alone," said Montrose, with much energy. "I will come with you, and we will take some creature comforts to our luckless friends and patriots for whose deliverance I would do anything."

"I am sure you would, for your heart is clean and brave," replied Cheng, grasping his hand and pressing it; "and, after we have seen them, we shall better know how to assist them."

After resting and partaking of some refreshment, they started for the Examiner-General's yamen, and, on arriving there, Cheng went in to see the Imperial Commissioner, while Montrose waited outside.

"I have seen the Chief Magistrate," said His Excellency, after exchanging further courtesies with his visitor, "but, in spite of my protests and strongly-urged extenuations and also recommendations to mercy, he remained obdurate, saying that the death sentence had already been signed by the Viceroy, and would be carried out on the eighth day of this moon, which is to-morrow."

"However," he added, handing a paper to Cheng, "I prevailed upon him to grant me this permit, which is made out for one Tung Weng, that is

yourself, and which authorises him to enter the gaol and hold converse with the prisoners in question."

"Sir, no words of mine could adequately express my gratitude to you," said Cheng, respectfully receiving the paper with both hands; "and, from the precautions you have wisely and graciously taken to screen my identity, I feel confident that you would never betray me."

There was something in Cheng's brilliant eyes which made the good mandarin turn kindly towards him and place a hand upon his shoulder.

"Be careful, my young friend," he said, in a subdued fatherly voice, "for you have a great future before you, if you be mindful of it. We live in troublous times, but in the midst of them we must keep our face calm and our mouth silent, lest we be dragged into the vortex of a whirlpool from which there is no deliverance."

With low obeisances and murmured thanks Cheng took leave of the worthy commissioner, and at once rejoined Montrose, with whom he proceeded to the prison, though pausing at intervals to purchase a few little luxuries which might be a boon to the prisoners. And among these things—much to the surprise of his companion—Cheng included a large jar of strong *samschu*, which he smilingly carried under his arm.

"Besides being a discoverer of secrets, wine is sometimes more effective than the force of arms or words," was the only reply he made as his reasons for taking so much liquor to his friends.

On arriving at the prison they were admitted by a savage-looking Shantung man, who informed them that he was under-gaoler and in immediate charge of the prisoners. Conducting them to a

dirty little room, he took Cheng's pass to the head-gaoler for inspection, and that functionary soon returned with him to inform them that the foreigner could not enter the cell, as only one person was mentioned on the pass. However, Montrose produced some good Mexican dollars, which soon put another complexion upon the matter and, with many smiles, the rascally officer bowed and retired, saying that, although he ran the imminent risk of losing his post for disobeying orders, he could not find heart to deny any favour to such true gentlemen.

The under-gaoler now led the way to a row of cells, the smallest of which he opened, allowing the visitors to enter; and, as they did so, an unpleasant odour assailed their noses. It was a low-roofed, filthy den with a mud floor and little ventilation, there being only a small grated air-hole in the roof, and, as a stream of light came through the open door, they saw two people sitting huddled together in a corner. They were the father and son who were doomed to death on the morrow.

Cheng at once approached them, at the same time asking in a tremulous voice whether they were well; for at first they had not moved, and he was horror-stricken at the sight of their misery.

Mo-kwah introduced his worthy parent to the visitors, and, although the poor man's clothes were hanging in rags, he bowed and received them with all the courtesy and amiability of better days, seeming to forget his plight and give dignity to his distress. While his son was eagerly conversing with Cheng, he engaged in conversation with Montrose, whose heart went out to him in pity and respect.

"It is an infamous shame," said the latter, looking

around the squalid cell, "that you and your dear son should be confined in such a filthy pen: why, the place is not fit for animals, much more human beings!"

"It is kind of you to speak like this," said Mr. Tai, with a smile of calm resignation, "but it might be worse, and our sufferings will soon be over. What we feel most is not being able to obtain enough water with which to wash ourselves, and we urgently need it in a place like this."

For a few moments Montrose excitedly paced the cell, his heart being full to overflowing of pity and indignation.

"To think that Heaven allows such sufferings and indignities!" he involuntarily exclaimed, turning to the unfortunate prisoner.

"Heaven meddles not with the petty contrivances of man," said the latter in a composed voice, "for it has provided that by the laws of Nature man moulds his own life and works his own destruction and redemption."

"Although we may die," he added, "and the persecutors of my race survive us and many nobler patriots, there will surely come a day of reckoning—a day when outraged humanity will rise and overwhelm the Manchu-Tartar dynasty with swift and summary retribution."

"Were you in hopes," asked Montrose, "of overturning the Government of Canton by the revolt in which, I presume, you were implicated?"

"We should have done so, had not the plans of our leader, Dr. Sen Fa Tai, been betrayed by the British Consul, who is supposed to have obtained his information from the Hongkong police. For, in the province of Kwang-tung alone, there are

two million able men ready to fight to the bitter end for the freedom of their country. Remember how they gathered round the standard of rebellion raised by the Taipings; and they are ready and impatient to do it again."

"A life like yours ought not to be lost," said Montrose with fervour and admiration. Then he added thoughtfully: "It might be saved—how are you guarded during the night?"

"These are our strongest guards," said the prisoner, ruefully looking upon the massive iron fetters which encumbered his limbs; "but, besides these, and the bars of the cell, there is the gate-keeper and gaoler, and also a couple of soldiers who generally pass their time in playing cards in the guard-room. They are relieved by two others at midnight, when the head-gaoler visits the cells."

Mr. Tai now called Cheng to him, at the same time looking cautiously towards the door and drawing from his garments a small roll of paper.

"I have managed, in spite of being rigidly searched, to secrete this document upon me," he said, speaking quickly, "and, as it contains the names and addresses of many important members of the Reform Party, as well as other information, I shall feel most deeply grateful if you will endeavour to personally deliver it into the hands of Dr. Sen Fa Tai who, since his miraculous escape, has been hiding somewhere in Hongkong—at least, so I recently heard through a fellow prisoner. I am not aware of his address, but if you go to No. 6, Shin Hing Lane, Hongkong, and ask for Mr. Chee Low, no doubt that gentleman will inform you of his whereabouts."

Cheng promised to deliver the paper as directed,

and then he and Montrose gave the prisoners the few things they had bought, and took leave of them, Cheng remaining behind for a minute to whisper certain words of comfort and encouragement. But, strange to say, instead of giving his friends the large jar of strong wine, he handed it, together with some silver, to the under-gaoler, who, by his brutal treatment, had made their lives almost unbearable.

"You have been kind to my poor friends, so take these things," he said with a bland smile, "and, as they have now only a few hours to live, I want you to favour them still more and alleviate their sufferings a little by freeing their weary limbs of those heavy irons, which are of no use now, for both of them are too weak to walk. I will call again to-night to take final leave of my friends, and if I find you have complied with this trivial request, you shall be liberally rewarded. In the meantime you can drink this good wine, but do so with moderation, as too much strong liquor is bad."

"You are a kind gentleman," said the grasping rogue, "and I will do all I can to make those poor friends of yours comfortable."

Cheng now rejoined Montrose, who was waiting for him, and they left the prison. Directly they were clear of it the former stopped abruptly and turned to his companion.

"Those two noble patriots shall not perish without an effort being made to rescue them," he said, regarding Montrose fixedly, "and it is my intention to leave for Hongkong at once, in order that I may, if possible, confer with Dr. Sen. I have surmounted one great obstacle by bribing the gaoler to remove the prisoners' irons, and the wine will be an auxiliary force in favour of their escape."

"I am heartily with you!" replied Montrose, impulsively grasping his hand. "Like you, I could not abandon that heroic couple to their fate without putting forth my whole strength to save them; and, since moral expedients are of no avail, we must perforce resort to physical ones.

"Let me see," he continued, consulting his watch, "it is now nearly two o'clock, and it would take us, at least, six and a half hours to reach Hongkong. There is no boat leaving here until five o'clock, so a return journey would be impracticable in the time at our disposal; for if our friends are to be saved, they must be saved before the dawn of another day, and, moreover, there must be means of eluding pursuit and of immediately removing them from Canton. Since it would be impossible to obtain in this city a launch which would suit our purpose, I will telegraph to a friend of mine in Hongkong asking him to charter a fast launch, and arrange that it arrives here by half-past eleven o'clock to-night. It can then await us with steam up, so as to be ready for instant flight."

"You are indeed my true friend!" exclaimed Cheng with earnest gratification; "and your plan of deliverance is good. But as it will be advisable for me to leave Canton, should my friends do so, I will now return to my lodgings and instruct Ah Sam to prepare my luggage. I shall remove my ponies to a good stable where they can remain for a few days until I commence my homeward journey."

"Bring your things to my lodgings," said Montrose; "and as I am soon leaving for a trip north to Shanghai, I will accompany you to Hongkong."

"About how much will the hire of the launch be?" asked Cheng, "as I will prepare the money."

"Never mind about that," replied Montrose. "If we are to be good friends there must be no standing upon trifles between us. My purse is well filled and at your service."

"I feel deeply grateful to you," said Cheng, his face flushing a little; for he had spent his money prodigally of late and was beginning to run short of it, and he fancied that his friend had guessed this.

Montrose at once went to the telegraph office and sent the following message:—

To JOHN HOUSTON, Esq.,

46, QUEEN'S ROAD, HONGKONG.

Please charter for me the fastest steam launch you can find and despatch it to the Shamzen, Canton, at once, or, at least, in time to arrive here not later than 11.30 to-night. Please wire advices at your earliest convenience, as the matter is of great importance. The launch captain must be prepared to implicitly obey my orders and to return to Hongkong at any hour in the morning. Hope to meet you personally to-morrow.

HERBERT MONTROSE.

FALKLAND HOUSE, SHAMEEN, CANTON.

Cheng and Ah Sam soon arrived at Falkland House with a couple of bulky valises, which were placed in readiness to transfer to the launch when it should arrive.

"Can you count upon Ah Sam's assistance in case of a struggle?" asked Montrose, critically surveying the stalwart Chinaman, who stood inquiringly behind his master.

"He would die for me," quietly responded Cheng. "But do you not think it would be advisable to enlist the aid of one or two more strong men who would dare anything and ask no

questions, providing they were well paid?—there are plenty of such to be found here.”

“I was just thinking the same,” said Montrose. “Perhaps Ah Sam could arrange this matter for us.”

That worthy expressed his willingness to do so, and was at once sent to recruit the necessary hands; while Montrose and his friend sat down and definitely settled their plan of action, which was very simple. Montrose was to dress in Chinese clothes, and with Cheng, Ah Sam, and the hired men, proceed at half-past twelve to the prison. Their two accomplices were to hide outside, in the meantime securing a stout rope to a post at the side of the road, and holding it in readiness to tie to the ring-handle of the door when the prisoners were outside, so as to prevent immediate pursuit; while Montrose and Cheng, followed by Ah Sam, were to enter the gaol and, having gained admittance to their friends, secure and gag the gaoler and decamp with the prisoners, the men outside being prepared to assist if necessary, and to secure the door from the outside.

Ah Sam soon returned with a couple of powerful-looking coolies willing to work or fight, as circumstances might demand, for the sum of three dollars each. Montrose promised to give each of them three dollars when they started on the enterprise, and—providing they kept their agreement—another three each on their return. The men went away in high glee, promising to return ready for business at ten o'clock.

At half-past four Montrose received the following telegram from his friend:—

TO HERBERT MONTROSE, ESQ.,

FALKLAND HOUSE, SHAMEEN, CANTON.

I have despatched to Canton a very smart launch, named the *Fatshan*, which has good accommodation for six or seven passengers. The *lowdah* of her is a trustworthy Cantonese man, who knows the river well, and will be ready to return to Hongkong at any hour. Can put you up at my bungalow on your arrival. With best *chin chin*.

JOHN HOUSTON.

The hours seemed to pass all too slowly for our friends who remained together during the rest of the day. The night was a fine one, though the moon rose at ten o'clock and gave more than sufficient light for their purpose. Having finished dinner they went and sat on the verandah, where they had been smoking and conversing for some time when Ah Sam hurried up to them with the news that the *Fatshan* had arrived. They at once proceeded with their luggage to the water-side, where they found a good-sized launch lying under steam at the landing-stage of the wharf. She was a smart-looking, white-painted boat with teak-wood fittings and a comfortable little cabin. The *lowdah*, who was a respectable middle-aged man, came forward to them as they stepped on board. Montrose asked him if he would be ready to start for Hongkong at a moment's notice, and, receiving an affirmative reply, told him to keep a good look-out for them at about one o'clock.

Having seen their personal effects and a basket containing refreshments safely stowed away in the cabin, Montrose disguised himself as a Chinaman and they returned to the house.

Shortly after midnight the two men they had engaged presented themselves and received

instructions. They were clad in light dungaree clothes with short trousers, their legs being bare and their feet protected by straw sandals.

All being in readiness the party started for the prison, Montrose and Cheng leading the way, and Ah Sam, who carried a lantern,* and the other two following at a respectful distance, so as not to attract attention. Our two friends were each armed with a short Penang stick and carried a pair of handcuffs, which were concealed in the ample sleeves of their jackets.

On arriving at the prison, Montrose quietly assisted one of the men to fasten a strong rope, which they had brought with them, to a post by the roadside, the other end being drawn out and laid near the wall so as to be ready for use. Having done this, he posted one man on either side of the door upon which he then knocked, Cheng standing beside him and Ah Sam behind.

A grating was opened, and at it appeared the ugly face of the under-gaoler, who smiled with greedy anticipation of further gain, and slid back the huge bolts and admitted them. He was about to prevent Ah Sam from entering, when Cheng explained that he was only his servant who always bore his lantern.

As they entered the yard a soldier, who had evidently been drinking rather heavily, staggered out of the guard-room and, gun in hand, approached them, at the same time demanding, in a loud tone and with many oaths, what right they had there.

"Here, my good man," said Cheng, in a

* The Chinese always carry lanterns at night.

"Attend not to him, my masters," said the gaoler. "I am a good man, and I have sworn to the safety of your friends."

Saying this, he unlocked the prisoners' holding it open, called to them. As Cheng the lantern and flashed it upon the two who stood up without irons and came. Montrose pinioned the gaoler from behind. Ah Sam clapped a thick cloth over his eyes. The wretch struggled violently, but Cheng handcuffed him, and, assisted by the prisoners, fastened his legs. Just as they had done somehow managed, by butting forward with their head, to capsize Ah Sam who in falling brought down the lantern.

"Make for the gate?" said Montrose, as he came from the guard-room and a soldier came out, followed by his drunken comrade.

Mr. Tai and his son, both of whose limbs were cramped with their confinement, ran toward the door, which was at once held open by the two men outside. Montrose and the rest were close behind them, and on the left of them; but as the distant

the bullet and fell. His assailant was rushing forward with uplifted weapon, when Montrose felled him to the ground with a mighty left-handed blow, and stooping down picked up the wounded youth and carried him to the door. In the meanwhile Cheng had received a nasty blow on the left arm from the butt of the other soldier's rifle, which had missed fire, though the next moment it was torn from his grasp by Ah Sam, who swung it above his head and placed him *hors de combat*.

This all happened in a far shorter time than it has taken to relate it, and, as the rescued and rescuers passed out of the prison door, a guard of soldiers came rushing in from another entrance, which communicated with the Under-Magistrate's yamen. But before they could cross the prison compound, the front door was closed and fastened from the outside by means of the rope.

There was now a great hue and cry raised, and before our friends had got very far the hubbub had increased tenfold, and they could plainly hear the fierce cries of their pursuers. Montrose made rather slow progress with his apparently lifeless burden, but those with him were plucky men and, instead of leaving him behind, ran beside him and by turns relieved him by carrying the wounded student, Cheng encouraging them by word and deed, though his arm was badly hurt and must have given him great pain.

Mr. Tai was only able to limp along, and had to be assisted by Ah Sam and one of the hired men, who, at times, carried him between them upon their shoulders.

Suddenly, from a narrow street ahead of them, two burly ruffians, armed with bamboo poles, who

had evidently joined in the chase, rushed out and tried to cut them off, at the same time yelling at the top of their voices to attract the notice of the soldiers. Cheng and Ah Sam both dashed forward, the former dodging a heavy blow aimed at his head and felling his antagonist with the short stick he carried; while the latter fiercely attacked the other man, using the rifle he had wrenched from the soldier, and must have killed him outright or severely fractured his skull.

Although this obstacle was quickly removed and their flight little impeded, it had discovered them to their pursuers, who suddenly appeared in full cry about five hundred yards behind them, their number having been greatly increased by stray vagabonds who were ripe for bloodshed and mischief.

The wounded student, who now began to show signs of life, and his lame father, were each hoisted upon the shoulders of two men, so that Cheng was the only one unburdened, and once more they dashed ahead. Then bullets began whistling above and around them, accompanied by sharp reports, and the two hired men proposed to abandon the helpless, and save their own lives.

"Be brave, my men!" cried Montrose, encouragingly; "we have now only a couple of thousand yards to go, and you shall have double pay and a safe passage to Hongkong."

With grunts of dogged acknowledgment, those sturdy fellows sweated and plodded at their best speed, every now and then muttering swear-words as a piece of lead whizzed dangerously near their heads and, with the full-throated chorus of blood-curdling yells and shots, caused them to leap forward with renewed interest.

Montrose was in a fever of excitement lest the launch should not be ready to cast off at once; because if she could not do so, or had insufficient steam, all would be lost, and the lives of his companions sacrificed.

As they turned an angle of the street the *Fatshan* came into view. Her *lowdah* had evidently heard the unusual noise and perhaps thought that it might have some connection with his charter, for he was standing alertly at the gangway, and thick smoke was streaming from the funnel; and directly the fugitives came into view his men rushed to the bow and stern lines, so as to be ready to let them go at once.

"Thank God, men, she is ready!" cried Montrose, the sweat pouring from his brow as he and his plucky little band made a last dash for freedom.

They were just passing over the gangway when the howling pack of pursuers turned the corner of the street, only fifty yards distant.

"All aboard, cast off!" gasped Montrose, as they gained the deck.

The lines splashed, the propeller churned the water, and the deck-hands pushed the little vessel off from the wharf just as the infuriated mob arrived at the landing stage.

Mr. Tai was at once assisted into the cabin, and his son was gently laid there upon a settee. A shower of bullets pattered upon the skylight and shattered the glass, but fortunately no injury was done beyond one of the men being rather badly grazed by a bullet as he dodged behind the fore-hatchway. Montrose now poured some brandy down Mo-kwah's throat and then carefully examined the wound. To their great joy it was soon

discovered that he was suffering more from shock and exhaustion than anything else, as the bullet had passed clean through the fleshy part of the right shoulder, so that only rest and nourishment were required, and in a short time the stimulant quite restored him to consciousness.

Montrose soon returned to the deck and, after heartily thanking the *lowdah* for his timely aid and smart handling of the launch, which had been the means of saving valuable lives, he invited him into the cabin to have some refreshment, the two hired men also receiving similar attention. The launch was now in mid-stream and safe from the chance shots of their baffled pursuers, whose blood-thirsty yells made night hideous as they ran for some distance along the bank of the river.

However, shots and shouts at length died away, and the "City of Rams" was left behind, the launch making between ten and twelve knots an hour under the skilful guidance of a good helmsman. So feeling safe for the time being, though very dubious as to whether steps would not be taken to head them off at Whampoa, since the authorities might wire to the officials there, Montrose returned to the cabin where a tempting meal was being laid by the indefatigable Ah Sam.

They all sat down together and did ample justice to the fare provided by Montrose, who, however, kept going up on deck to watch their progress and ascertain whether they were being pursued by any vessel. It was a most anxious time for him, though he did not give expression to his fears in the presence of his companions, lest it should mar their pleasure and spoil their appetite. Presently the masts of the shipping at Whampoa

came into view, for the moon was now shining in a clearer atmosphere, and the *lowdah* took the helm himself, while Montrose and Cheng stood together eagerly peering ahead through a pair of binoculars.

"I hope there is no Chinese man-of-war lying there," said Montrose, "for, should the officials have wired from Canton, it might give chase."

"Look there," said Cheng, directing his gaze towards the right bank of the river which was partly in shadow; "there is a big *taimung* hoisting sail and heading across stream as if to cut us off."

"True enough!" exclaimed Montrose, watching the suspicious movements of the stranger. "But, having no steam, she cannot do much, unless her skipper is daring enough to train a gun on us."

"Keep her a little to port," he added, turning to the *lowdah*, who at once shifted the helm.

"Hark, sir, how they are shouting!" said the latter, pointing to the gaunt-looking vessel, over the stern of which a large creaking oar had been shipped and was being worked by a dozen or more men.

"They are on our track, sure enough," said Montrose, "and we must give her a wide berth, as sailors say."

In a few minutes the *taimung* was in the middle of the river, which was rather narrow at that point; and as the launch approached as if to cross her bows, a tongue of flame flashed from her head as a blank shot was fired.

"That looks like business," coolly observed Cheng; and several heads appeared above the skylight companion-way, the report having disturbed the peace of mind of those below.

"We had better change our course and run under her stern," said the *lowdah*; "for directly it

is known that we do not intend obeying her order to heave-to, they may open fire on us."

The helm was again altered and, describing a half circle, the launch steered for the right bank of the river where another junk was now seen to draw out from the shore and set sail on the port tack, there being a gentle westerly wind.

"Give her all steam!" shouted the *lowdah* to the man in the engine-room, as one of the *taimung's* port quarter-guns belched forth a sheet of flame and a round shot screamed over the *Fatshan*.

Fresh fuel was added to the boiler fire and, with the black smoke streaming from her quivering funnel, the launch dashed ahead, passing some distance astern of the large war-junk. As she did so, the inshore vessel's bowchaser opened fire, and a shot struck the water on the starboard side and ricocheted so close over the *Fatshan's* deck that it carried away part of the rail and went through the glass skylight.

"That was a close shave," said Montrose, with a sigh of relief.

The *lowdah* now steered close under the shelter of the right bank, handling the little boat with great skill, and keeping her, as much as possible, stern on to the enemy; for shot after shot was fired at her, and, had one of them hulled her or perforated the engine, all would have been lost. But fortunately a large cloud obscured the moon for some minutes, causing the gunners to aim wildly, and giving the flying launch time to turn a sharp curve of the river and put a point of land between her and the war-junks; and, when the sky was again clear, the firing had ceased, and the discomfited pursuers were giving vent to their

vexation in fierce yells. These, however, soon died away in the distance, and the course was made easy by the widening of the river.

"May the gods be thanked," said Cheng, solemnly and gratefully; and again he grasped the hand of his English friend and warmly eulogised his fearlessness and circumspection.

"As you remarked, we were not made for their net," he concluded, adding with a sage smile, "and you must pardon my presumption in stating that it is my firm conviction you were not made for listless scenes, nor fashioned for priestly robes."

"Perhaps I may claim to be a better judge of that," said Montrose somewhat shortly, leaving Cheng's side and joining Mr. Tai and his son, who had now come on deck, the latter declaring that he felt well and hearty, though both had been much alarmed by the attack of the junks.

As the river was now fast broadening, and the Bogue Forts had been passed in safety, the *lowdah* entrusted the helm to another man, and, going down into the fore-peak, chin-chinned a little gilded joss which stood in a small box with a glass front, all sailors taking one of these to sea with them. Having thanked the deity for guarding the launch, he lighted some joss sticks, and, placing them and some food-offerings before the shrine, returned to the deck and fired off several strings of crackers, being anxious that no malignant spirits should cause a disaster by their presence.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE END OF THE ADVENTURE

The sun was rising in tropic splendour when the launch bearing our friends approached the island of Hongkong, or "Fragrant Streams," as its name implies.

Steering in towards the Praya, they stopped at the landing-stage near the Central Market, where they would not be likely to attract attention, that part being chiefly frequented by the poorer classes of Chinese, and by native boats carrying passengers and merchandise to and from the island and the mainland.

After paying the hired men and giving them and the *lowdah* each a substantial gratuity, Montrose had his luggage deposited in the nearest hotel, and then accompanied his friends up Pottinger Street to Shin Hing Lane, which runs from Hollywood Road to Gough Street.

Tai Mo-kwah and his father were so elated at their escape, and refreshed by the rest and food during the passage from Canton, that they were able to walk quite briskly, the young student seeming to feel little pain or inconvenience from his wound beyond being unable to use his right

hand; and Cheng was also in high spirits, in spite of his left arm being in a sling.

They had proceeded some distance when Montrose noticed that they were being followed by a *lukong*, or native policeman,* but, knowing how inquisitive the Chinese are, he did not attach any importance to this, particularly as the man walked in a listless, preoccupied manner, and did not pause or even appear to take any notice of the house at which they presently stopped.

No. 6, Shin Hing Lane was a small, one-storied building with a flat roof screened by a mat and bamboo awning. When our friends knocked at the door, it was opened by a Chinese boy who scrutinised them narrowly and suspiciously before allowing them to enter. Then, having inquired their names and business, he left them standing in the narrow passage, and, ascending a rickety flight of stairs to an upper room, soon re-appeared with an elderly white-haired man who answered to the name of Chee Low.

Mr. Tai exchanged a few words privately with him, and then they were all invited into a small though clean apartment on the ground floor.

"I am quite sure," said the old gentleman, addressing Mr. Tai, and motioning them to be seated, "that my dear friend, Dr. Sen, will be delighted to hear of your escape, and will also feel deeply grateful to your brave companions for the valuable service they have thus rendered the Reform Party.

"If you will excuse me a moment," he added, rising, "I will make known your arrival to the

* Some of the Hongkong *lukongs* are very smart men and are frequently employed in detective work.

Doctor, and procure for you some refreshment."

Evidently there were means of communication between that house and an adjoining one, probably by the roof, as Mr. Chee was some time gone. At length, however, he ushered into the room a short, sun-tanned countryman of his who wore eye-glasses, and was dressed in European clothes. He was evidently a man of great intellectual capacity and determination, for his brow was broad and high, and his mouth small and firm, though his face bore a frank and pleasing expression.

"My dear friend," he said, addressing Mr. Tai in Cantonese, "I thank Heaven that you have been spared to return to me, for, although powerless to assist you, I was in sore distress at losing so dear a friend and so brave a champion of our cause. I was going away from Hongkong to-day with a heavy heart, but now all is changed and I shall leave rejoicing."

Mr. Tai replied briefly, and then introduced his son and his rescuers, at the same time speaking in glowing terms of their courage and kindness.

The Doctor thanked Cheng, with whom he entered into a short conversation, in which he dwelt upon the wretched state of the country, the decay of its institutions, the mismanagement of public affairs, and the dishonesty of the officials.

"Ah," he said, turning to Montrose, "I shall never rest contented until I have convinced my countrymen of the necessity of reform, and the utter impossibility of accomplishing anything approaching to it, until the empire is freed of its iniquitous rulers—and freed of them it shall be!"

"How do you propose to accomplish this stupendous task?" asked Montrose.

"By gaining the support, or at least the sympathy, of the European Powers, and of the influential Chinese civilians, the latter by means of a journal which I hope to soon print in this colony and widely circulate throughout Southern China. I am now about to proceed to England, via America, for the purpose of explaining to your countrymen the aims of the Reform Party, and if possible arouse a friendly interest in the cause; for recent events have plainly demonstrated to me the impossibility of resisting the Manchu-Tartar government while it is backed by your guns and assisted by your officials. It was through the British Consul at Canton that our last rising was frustrated, for he got the information from some spy in Hongkong, and then communicated it to the Viceroy, at the same time wiring home a report that a large number of desperate characters had banded together at Canton for the purpose of massacring the foreigners. This was wholly untrue, since our movement was purely anti-dynastic."

"Supposing," said Montrose, "that you are unable to completely subdue the Imperialists; what course would you be likely to pursue?"

"We should probably endeavour to form the provinces of Kwang-tung and Kwang-si into a free and independent state which would be thrown open to foreign trade and intercourse. I can only hope and pray that, in the event of this scheme being adopted, it will not be wrecked or hindered by European intervention; for, until some stable government is instituted in the 'Middle Kingdom,' you will never make any lasting progress here. For the Manchu-Tartar administration always contrives—while appearing friendly to you and

solicitous of your interests—to secretly rob and persecute those civilians who have dealings with you, and to bar your way at every point; and this after their generous promises and proposals when they required and obtained your assistance in suppressing the Christian revolution of the Taipings. Surely by this time all Englishmen must know how much they can depend upon the Dowager Empress and her minions of the Dragon Throne?"

"Well," said Montrose, rising to leave, "I wish you and the brave Southerners every success; and you may rest assured that, while inquiring into the condition of your people and studying their social and religious problems, I shall do all in my limited power to further the cause of justice, freedom, and humanity."

Then, after expressing a hope that he would have the pleasure of meeting the doctor again, and making an appointment for that evening with Cheng, who had arranged to take lodgings in a Chinese boarding-house which Mr. Chee Low had recommended, Montrose left the house and proceeded to his hotel, where he sat down to breakfast. Afterwards he rested himself awhile and then strolled out to see his friend Houston and settle about the hiring of the launch.

That evening Montrose met Cheng, who informed him that Dr. Sen had left Hongkong that morning by the mail steamer for Honolulu, where he intended staying for a week or two with some relatives, and that Mr. Tai and his son were stopping for the present with Mr. Chee Low, but intended to leave with him in a couple of days for their native town in order to remove their family

to another part of the country, where they might be safe from danger.

"I shall be really sorry to part with you, for true friends are rare," he said, earnestly and candidly; "but I long to return home to my family and to receive their congratulations.

"Oh, it will be a great day for me, when I again sight the walls of Lien!" he added with thoughtful and imaginative enthusiasm. "All my clansmen, and all the leading citizens will come forth to honour and welcome me—as one who has returned victorious and shed lustre upon them. It is a good old custom, and will never die."

He now relapsed into meditative silence, and they walked along the Queen's Road until they came to a large building in the native quarter of the town, into which a number of people were passing. This was the Ko-Shing theatre; so, wishing to while away an hour or two, our friends entered and went to the ticket-office, which stood on the left-hand side of the doorway, and was guarded by thick wooden bars and wire lattice-work, and obtained two twenty-five cent red-coloured passes for seats in the body of the theatre. They were then shown into a spacious, square-shaped hall, with galleries on either side and facing the stage, which merely consisted of a large platform with curtains at the back, but no scenery.*

On this occasion the performance was a five-act drama entitled "The Golden-leafed Chrysanthemum," in which soldiers, students, ministers and beautiful women kept the audience well amused

* For a description of Chinese theatres, see "The Mystic Flowery Land."

until one or two o'clock in the morning. But our friends did not wait to see the last act (when certain wicked rebels were overcome, and the hero and heroine married), and at eleven o'clock made their way back to their respective lodgings.

On arriving at the hotel, Montrose went into the smoking-room and taking up the *Hongkong Telegraph*, an evening paper, sat down to enjoy a smoke. His eye almost immediately rested upon a paragraph which ran thus :—

DARING RESCUE AND ESCAPE FROM CANTON.

Our readers will no doubt remember the recent anti-foreign revolt at Canton, which was fortunately suppressed by the Viceroy, and most of the ringleaders imprisoned. Among the latter was a notorious criminal named Tai who, with his son, was to have been executed to-day. It appears that on Tuesday morning the condemned men were visited by an Englishman and a Chinaman, whose names are at present unknown to us. After staying a short time they left the prison, but returned about midnight accompanied by three coolies, two of whom remained outside. Suddenly the two prison guards were aroused by cries, and, rushing out, saw the prisoners and their confederates making for the front entrance, the door of which was held open by those outside. One of the soldiers was killed by a blow from a cudgel, and the other stunned, and their assailants and the prisoners at once decamped. Although pursuit was given, they succeeded in escaping in a launch, believed to be the *Fatshan*, which is supposed to have landed the party in this colony. Search is being made for the escaped convicts, though up to the time of our going to press no further news has come to hand.

“Escaped convicts !” Montrose exclaimed with scornful contempt, adding a soliloquy : “If the person responsible for this paragraph were half as broad-minded and patriotic as those whom he stigmatises, perhaps he would be more conscious of the grave responsibility resting upon a jour-

nalist and less eager to give damaging publicity to every Chinese official's report."

Being too much vexed and concerned to read more he put the paper down, and going to his room retired to rest, though for some time he could not sleep, his mind being disturbed with anxious doubts and fears for the safety of his friends.

Next morning he was awakened at the usual time, but, having had a somewhat restless night, went to sleep again until nearly ten o'clock. He was dressing himself when a servant knocked at the door and informed him that a young Chinese gentleman named Hung Fong Cheng wished to see him immediately and was waiting downstairs.

"Show him up here," said Montrose, with grave misgivings; and shortly afterwards Cheng entered the room in a state of feverish agitation.

"Oh, my dear Mr. Montrose," he said, grasping the Englishman's hand, "pardon my untimely intrusion, but poor Mr. Tai and Mo-kwah were arrested this morning, and have been handed over to the Chinese authorities. What can be done? They will surely be executed at once!"

"Dear me! This is too terrible!" ejaculated Montrose, turning pale with horror and despair. "From whom did you obtain this intelligence?"

"From Mr. Chee Low," replied Cheng, vigorously fanning himself. "I called at his house at nine o'clock to see my friends, and found the old gentleman quite overcome with distress. He said that an English sergeant of police, accompanied by a Chinese official and several *lukongs* who surrounded the premises, suddenly entered the house and, before the fugitives had time to escape, arrested them under a warrant from the Chief of

Police. The house-boy followed them to the station, and shortly afterwards witnessed their removal to Kowloon."

"Come!" said Montrose, putting on his coat and hurrying from the room. "I will at once see the Chief Inspector of Police, and find out if anything can be done."

Without waiting to breakfast, he and Cheng left the hotel. Making their way along the Praya and turning to the right they crossed the Queen's Road and quickly traversing Wyndham Street and Hollywood Road soon came to the Central Police Station, which stands upon high ground.

Deeming it advisable that Cheng should not show himself to the police, Montrose asked him to go down and wait for him at the corner of Lyndhurst Terrace, which he did. Then entering the large gates of the building, he was met by an English constable, by whom he was ushered into the office of the Chief Inspector of Police.

Montrose politely explained the cause of his visit, and inquired if there was any possibility of his being able to save the lives of the two unfortunate persons in whom he was interested.

"Before I answer any questions," said the Chief Inspector, eyeing him with haughty suspicion, "I should very much like to know whether you are the gentleman who so kindly assisted those villains to escape from Canton."

"Your words seem to imply that I have come here with some confession to make," answered Montrose, "whereas I have done so in order to try and save the lives of two worthy and respectable people with whom I am well acquainted."

"No doubt your motives are highly commend-

able," said the Chief Inspector with a cynical smile, "though perhaps you are not aware that, by assisting these rebel friends of yours, you lay yourself open to banishment from this colony."

"Sir!" retorted Montrose, somewhat impatiently and very severely, "I did not come here to discuss with you my personal conduct or affairs; and, as you do not seem disposed to favour me with the information I seek, I will not further waste your valuable time, or my own; good morning."

Leaving that consequential person to his great responsibilities, which chiefly resulted in patriotic and independent-minded Chinese citizens being banished from Hongkong, Montrose quitted the Police Station and, rejoining Cheng, went up Pedder's Hill towards Government House, with the intention of obtaining an interview with Sir Thomas Falkland Hews, the Governor.

Nearing the outer gate of Government House Montrose left Cheng behind and, passing the guard of Sikh policemen on duty there, went to the front entrance, where his card was received by a polite "Celestial," who showed him into an ante-room, where he waited about half an hour. Then he was ushered into the presence of Sir Thomas Hews, who was a tall, military-looking man with a severe, frowning visage and penetrating grey eyes, one of which glared through an eye-glass.

Montrose apologised for his intrusion and urged in extenuation his earnest desire to save the lives of his two Chinese friends. Then he gave a true and touching account of the son's futile endeavour to save his father's life by sacrificing his own, and concluded by appealing to His Excellency's good feeling and high sense of justice.

"I regret to say that I do not see any reasonable grounds for my interference," said His Excellency, blandly. "In the first place, the father actually took up arms against his own Government, which is an act of treason, and, in any country, a capital offence; and, in the second place, according to Chinese law, the condemned man's relations are also liable to be executed. Moreover, in this case one of the gaolers was killed and another badly injured during the escape of the prisoners."

"That may be, your Excellency," said Montrose, with respectful attention; "but I always thought that when any person took refuge and was afterwards arrested in this colony, he was examined by the English authorities, and in all cases received the full benefit of our law. It seems that my unfortunate friends were immediately handed over to the Chinese authorities."

"In their case the official papers and death sentences were, no doubt, sent down from Canton, and were examined by the Chief Inspector, who was evidently convinced of the guilt of the prisoners, and acted quite in accordance with the laws ruling these matters.

"In support of this," added Sir Thomas, taking a large book from a shelf, "I will quote from the Treaty with China and Great Britain, signed at Tientsin, June 26, 1858. Article twenty-one says: *"If criminals, subjects of China, shall take refuge in Hongkong, or on board a British ship, they shall, upon due requisition by the Chinese authorities, be searched for, and, on proof of their guilt, be delivered up."*

"But the son's guilt could not have been proved: for he was innocent!" urged Montrose; "and I can

assure your Excellency, I never knew a nobler and better young man. And he is worthy of his father, who is a true patriot and a gentleman."

"Of course you know more about these persons than we do," replied the Governor in an off-hand dignified manner; "but if we were to raise sentimental objections in every extradition case which is brought before our notice, this place would be overrun with vagabonds and murderers of every description."

"Sir," said Montrose, rising and speaking with passionate earnestness, "the lives of two noble fellow-creatures are at stake, and I beg you to exert your good influence in their behalf, that they may yet be saved from an undeserved death."

"I admire your enthusiasm, sir," responded His Excellency, with a supercilious adjustment of the eye-glass, "though I lament that it should be so lavishly expended upon unworthy objects."

"Then I conclude, sir," said Montrose with undisguised anguish and indignation, "that you refuse to assist those for whom I plead."

"Your deduction is correct, Mr. Montrose," said Sir Thomas with a lofty inclination of the head and rising, "for by accommodating you I should be covertly assisting certain rogues and rebels to undermine the Government of China which it is England's policy to uphold."

Mutely bowing, Montrose quitted the room and hurriedly left the house, wondering while he went how it was that people in high places were so hard-hearted and indifferent to the fate of others.

Cheng was pacing the dusty road in anxious expectation, and on hearing the result of the interview, seemed quite stunned with despair and

disappointment. Montrose advised him to leave Hongkong for his own quiet home, and to forget all about political intrigues and Manchu-Tartar treachery and misrule.

"Think of your own dear family," he added, "and forsake these harrowing scenes. We can do no more. They are in God's hands."

Cheng sorrowfully bowed his head for a moment, and then said with a deep sigh: "Yes, I will do as you suggest, and strive to forget what I have seen, though it is very dreadful, and ought to be rectified. Fortunately I have to-day sent Ah Sam to Canton to fetch our ponies, and he will return to-night; so we shall in all probability start for home to-morrow morning."

"Take my advice: avoid Canton," said Montrose, seriously. "I should go by boat up the river to Hiang Shan, and then keep well to the westward, following the Heung River, which crosses the Pekiang River below Canton, though about seventy li* to the westward of the city, and enters it again to the north-west."

After making other inquiries respecting their luckless friends, yet without gaining any further tidings, they separated, arranging to meet at seven o'clock that evening. Cheng returned to his lodgings, and Montrose to the hotel, where he wrote several letters, and then went to the C. M. S. N. Co.'s office and booked a passage in the steamer *Taisan* for Shanghai, where he intended staying for a couple or three months.

At six o'clock that evening he obtained a copy of the *Hongkong Telegraph*, and was not a little

*.Twenty geographical miles.

startled on reading the following paragraph:—

ARREST OF ESCAPED CRIMINALS
IN HONGKONG.

At an early hour this morning Sergeant Low, accompanied by a Chinese official and several *lukongs*, effected the capture of the two Chinese rebels who escaped from Canton on Tuesday at midnight. It appears that on Wednesday morning the prisoners landed at the Central Market and were followed by police constable Sha Tai to a house in Shin Hing Lane, where they were subsequently arrested under a warrant from the Captain-Superintendent, who at once handed them over to the Chinese authorities, the necessary documents having been sent down from Canton. We hear that these notorious criminals are to be beheaded at Kowloon to-morrow morning at nine o'clock; and that the police are on the track of a certain Chinese student named Tung Weng, who assisted them to escape, and is supposed to be in league with a powerful gang of desperadoes.

"Good Heavens! they are after Cheng!" exclaimed Montrose, casting the paper aside and jumping to his feet.

Without waiting another moment he left the hotel and hastened by a back way to the lodgings occupied by the young graduate, whom he found drinking tea and gloomily reading a Chinese poem.

"My dear friend," said Montrose, in a tone of deep import, "you are in danger, and must leave Hongkong at once. Has Ah Sam returned with the horses?"

"Yes," replied Cheng, crossing the room and closing the door, "he has just taken them to a stable close by. But what causes you this alarm?"

Montrose briefly explained everything, and urged him not to delay his departure.

"Prepare everything," he added, "and directly it is dark I will accompany you up the river to Hiang Shan. But on no account leave this house

until after nightfall; and in the meantime I will go and make arrangements for the hire of a launch. The ponies can be towed behind in a small cargo-lighter."

"I am indeed grateful to you," said Cheng, adding with a grim, sorrowful smile, "Hongkong does not seem a very safe place, after all, for your countrymen are not satisfied with arresting and causing the death of my poor friends, but must also hunt *me* down."

"True, indeed, dear friend," said Montrose, pressing his hand in a brotherly way and leaving the room.

Proceeding to the western end of the Praya, he looked about for a good launch, which he at length espied lying out in the stream and fastened to a buoy. Taking a *sampan* he went aboard and saw the *lowdah*, who at once came to terms to land the men and horses on the mainland near Hiang Shan for the sum of twenty Mexican dollars. Montrose agreed to this, and giving him a small advance told him to be ready at the West Point landing-stage at half-past nine.

Then returning to the hotel he had dinner and afterwards attired himself in a suitable manner for the night journey. Shortly before nine o'clock he set out for Cheng's lodgings, stopping on the way to purchase a couple of small and serviceable Colt's revolvers, with ammunition, which he intended should take the place of the old horse-pistols carried by the young student and Ah Sam, both of whom he found fully prepared for immediate flight. They were delighted with the weapons, which Montrose showed them how to handle.

It was now sufficiently dark for their purpose, so they left the house and made their way by the least frequented thoroughfares to West Point, where the launch was waiting, also a small cargo-lighter into which the horses were led by means of a sloping gangway used for that purpose, Ah Sam going aboard with them.

Fortunately only one or two poor coolies witnessed their departure, and directly they gained the deck the launch cast off and steamed ahead into the gathering gloom, gradually increasing speed as they got clear of the crowd of junks at anchor there.

"Although I am going home," said Cheng, seating himself beside Montrose, on deck, "my heart feels heavy and is haunted with forebodings. Last night I was full of happiness, because poor Mo-kwah and his honourable father were free, and, as I thought, safe; and to-night they are in some loathsome prison awaiting their death summons—and I fleeing for safety to my native place, perhaps never to meet you again."

"Cheer up, dear friend," said Montrose, speaking as hopefully as possible, "you are victoriously returning to the loved ones at home, and will receive a glorious welcome. You must look forward to a bright and prosperous future, and leave political strife alone; and, if God orders it, be sure we shall meet again, and perhaps spend many more bright and peaceful days together."

"I hope so, I hope so," said Cheng, with much feeling. "But, anyhow, I shall never forget your kindness to me and my friends, nor yet the happy and instructive hours I have spent in your company. I only regret that you are not accompanying me back to Lien."

They continued in close and earnest conversation during the whole of the journey, which occupied nearly five hours, and was performed without mishap, the moon lighting their way during the latter part; and shortly after two o'clock the launch slowed down and drew in towards the left bank of the river, the *lowdah* taking soundings with a long bamboo.

Being a very light-draft vessel she was able to run in quite close to the shore and land them and the horses in a couple of feet of water, so that they only had a short distance to wade before they were on *terra firma*.

One of the crew, who was well acquainted with that district, gave Cheng some valuable advice and information respecting the best route to take, which was almost due west, so that he would reach the Heung River by day-light, and there be able to hire a suitable boat, or follow on horseback the course of the stream.

It was now time to part, so Montrose walked with Cheng some distance away from the launch, and Ah Sam followed with the ponies, which were in good condition.

For a few moments the two young men stood with clasped hands and with the moon shining upon their grave, handsome faces.

"I will think of you and pray for you: and you do the same for me," said Montrose, simply and earnestly, producing from his pocket a beautifully bound copy of the New Testament. I want you to do me a great favour, and that is to sometimes read this little book. Read it when you feel tired and downcast and it will give you peace of mind. And now, dear Cheng, good bye, and may God

bless you, be with you, and prosper you and yours always; and may He watch over you in your wanderings and give you a pleasant journey homeward."

"Your memory and your blessing are enshrined in my heart," replied Cheng, in a slow, tremulous voice; "and may the gods grant you Heavenly favours and permit us to meet again. I will certainly read this handsome book for which I thank you sincerely."

With a low, courtly bow, he turned and mounted his pony. Then waving a last adieu, he loosened the reins, and, with his faithful follower, rode away through the moonlight, going in a westerly direction.

Montrose stood thoughtfully watching him for some time, and then as his youthful form and Ah Sam's bulky one grew indistinct in the misty distance, he walked back to the launch, which at once started back for Hongkong.

It was striking seven as our friend again landed in Victoria, a favourable tide having accelerated the return passage; and, although feeling fatigued and down-hearted, he remembered that he had another duty to perform, and that was to endeavour to see and give consolation to Mr. Tai and his son, who were to be executed that morning at Kowloon. Returning to the hotel, he lay down for an hour and then had breakfast, after which he went over in a passenger-launch to the opposite mainland, and arrived at the execution ground, which was situated on the beach facing the harbour, just as a crowd of sightseers of all nationalities began to congregate there.

Nearly three-quarters of an hour had elapsed when a loud murmuring attracted his attention,

and, looking in the direction of Kowloon city, he saw a number of soldiers approaching, headed by two corpulent mandarins, who waddled along with the dignity and similitude of prize turkeys, their dress denoting them to be petty magistrates. In the middle of the procession were four Yâmen-runners carrying between them two baskets containing the poor creatures who were to die, these being superintended by a swaggering ruffian who flourished an immense two-handed sword, and, with fierce gesticulations, displayed for the edification of the awe-inspired public a dirty hand bearing a huge ring which signified that he was the executioner.

Montrose at once went forward and, as the procession stopped, he approached the officials, who were seating themselves upon a wooden bench in order to witness the execution, and asked if he might be allowed to have a few words and to pray with the prisoners.

"Oh yes, go pray with the rogues," said the elder magistrate, with a coarse laugh; "but kindly use dispatch, as our business is pressing."

By this time the doomed persons had been removed from the baskets, and were kneeling side by side, their arms being tightly pinioned behind and fastened by means of a chain to the leg-irons, so that they were unable to move; while their queues were held above the head, so as to leave the neck free, by pieces of stick, from each of which dangled a strip of linen inscribed with the name, crime, and sentence.

Not a trace of fear or emotion was visible in either of those noble faces as they calmly though wistfully looked around for the last time upon the sunny scene.

"My dear friends," said Montrose, advancing to them and gently laying his hands upon their shoulders, "be of good cheer, for you are going to your Father in Heaven. You are leaving this cruel world, but your names will not be forgotten."

"Yes, our hearts are clean," said Mr. Tai, stoutly, "and, had we been spared, we should not have desisted from trying to free our country of its accursed rulers."

"Allow us once again to sincerely thank you for all you have done for us," said Mo-kwah, his dauntless voice quavering as he added, "I am glad that dear Cheng did not come with you; but I feel sure he will tell our family and our clansmen that father and I died happily, and together."

"He will, he will," said Montrose in a husky voice; "and now let me kneel beside you and mingle my prayers with yours."

"You pray your own way," he added, since they looked somewhat embarrassed, "and your prayers will surely be heard."

Then upon the hot sands, and in the presence of a jeering crowd of soldiers and spectators, he knelt beside them and with earnest assurance consigned their souls to the safe-keeping of the one all-merciful God; while they devoutly bowed their heads and said that which was also received and recorded on high.

Then, with a last cheerful word of farewell, he turned away; and, as he did so, he heard one of the magistrates give a loud command, and a low murmuring from the crowd told him that all was over.

Without daring to look back he made his way to the landing-stage, and at once returned to the

colony, his ears ringing with the last heroic words of those martyred friends, and his eyes dimmed with the reflection of that awful sight—a sight which still further embittered his heart against the ruthless, arbitrary Government of China.

He was disgusted with the men who, for policy's sake, had handed over those two noble-hearted Chinese gentlemen to the sword of the executioner; and, being somewhat feeble in health, he was anxious to leave for the north as soon as possible.

That evening a very offensive article appeared in the *Telegraph* accusing him of assisting and encouraging traitors, and giving credence to a report that "*in consequence of his un-missionary-like behaviour he would probably be banished from Hongkong for a sufficient number of months to enable him to learn prudence and gentility.*"

In response, Montrose penned a long and able letter to the *Hongkong Daily Press*, in which he searchingly reviewed our policy in the Far East, and sternly denounced the Manchu-Tartar Administration; and he concluded by openly avowing his interposition in behalf of those who had perished, and expressing much regret that he had been unable to again tear them from the blood-stained hands of the barbarous mandarins.

Next morning at eleven o'clock he went aboard the steamer *Taisan*, which was advertised to sail at noon. He was met at the gangway by Captain Keg, a sprightly little man with small, sparkling eyes, ruddy complexion and a very round head, which would have appeared like unto a turnip had it not been for a few hay-like tufts of hair which also adorned his jovial face.

"Delighted to make your acquaintance, Mr.

Montrose," he said, cordially gripping his hand. "Come and have a whisky and soda with me!"

Montrose was charmed with the breeziness of this honest mariner, which was most refreshing and in pleasing contrast with the general manner and bearing of the stiff-necked *taipans* who set the fashion on shore, and who, with other lions of the Club verandah, baited the passing reporter with a patronising nod, and inspired the *Telegraph* with their "attitude."

After partaking of some refreshment, and having seen his luggage deposited in his berth, Montrose went on deck. The vessel was just leaving the wharf, and standing together on the quarter-deck he noticed a lady and gentleman. The former at once attracted his attention, for, although she had grown much taller, he seemed to recognise in her an old and once dear friend; so, raising his hat, he approached them.

"Pardon me," he said, addressing her, "but have I the pleasure of again meeting Miss Laura Rashley?"

"Dear me! Can it be you, Mr. Montrose?" she replied, extending her hand and colouring deeply. "Allow me to introduce you to my husband, Mr. Cecil Brancome."

The two men exchanged civilities, and then the lady informed Montrose that she had been married over a year, and was residing in Shanghai, to which place they were now returning after a trip to Singapore, where Mr. Brancome had business connections, he being a merchant. So there seemed every probability of Montrose spending a very pleasant holiday up north, and he was not sorry to have met an old friend.

While they were conversing the *tiffin* gong sounded and, in company with the genial skipper, they descended into the luxurious saloon, where we will now take leave of them for the present.



CHAPTER XIX

THE FATE OF LUH-HWA

We must now return to Lien. After Mrs. Hung Lee-fah had left her home on that fatal night to go to her unfortunate husband, Ah-choi hurried on the preparations for her own and Luh-hwa's flight, the latter assisting as much as possible, though she was quite bewildered with grief; for it all seemed to her like some horrible dream, that the home should be thus suddenly broken up and its members dispersed. The poor amahs, be it said to their credit, particularly the worthy Mrs. Lao, remained with them to the last, risking the displeasure of the Taotai, and the possibility of being imprisoned; and one of them actually volunteered to accompany them to Canton. But for reasons only known to herself, Ah-choi declined the offer, and, just before her departure, paid and discharged them, though the poor woman lingered behind to take tender leave of Luh-hwa, whom they all loved.

Shortly before twelve o'clock Mr. Wong A-chih came in by the back entrance, accompanied by a couple of young students who were to carry the fugitives' luggage, the three of them being dressed as common workmen. The two ladies disguised

themselves as much as possible by putting on old clothes and enveloping their heads in large shawls, and then they left the house with Mr. Wong, who preceded them with the luggage, which consisted of three large valises made so that they could easily be strapped upon a horse, either in front or behind the saddle.

On arriving at the south gate of the city, which was closed, Mr. Wong had some difficulty in prevailing upon the keeper there to allow the ladies, whom he represented as his wife and daughter, to pass out; but Ah-choi came forward and, while upbraiding the man loudly for inconveniencing them, handed him a small packet of silver which had the desired effect, and one of the ponderous doors was opened sufficiently to allow them to pass through. Then with a loud clanging sound it closed behind them, and Luh-hwa inquired of Mr. Wong how he was going to manage about returning home.

"Fear not for me, my dear young lady," he answered gently, "I know a certain place in the wall where my young friends and I can easily climb over*; and it will be an honour to us to think that we have been able to serve you."

Some little distance from the city wall, and near a small clump of trees, a driver and three stout little ponies were waiting. Upon these the valises were strapped, and then, assisted by Mr. Wong and the students, the ladies mounted and, after bidding farewell to the kind-hearted old gentleman and his

*In most of the walls of Chinese cities there are places where the inhabitants have for ages and ages climbed over in order to evade the gate-keeper's "squeeze money," though there is a heavy penalty for doing so. In the city of Kiung-chow, on the Island of Hainan, South China, the author several times saw elderly men passing over the wall, assisted by younger ones.

companions, rode away into the darkness, going in a southerly direction.

For several hours they proceeded in silence, Luh-hwa being too much engrossed with her own sad thoughts to converse; and as day began to dawn they entered a small village and stopped at a wayside inn. Here they rested awhile and had some refreshment, and then Ah-choi busied herself in making arrangements for another start; but, instead of retaining the animals which had brought them from Lien, she hired others and engaged a man who had been a caravan driver and was well acquainted with the southern provinces. With him she conversed in an undertone for fully an hour, and then gave him some money, after which she and Luh-hwa resumed their journey.

They continued to travel in a southerly direction for a few miles and then suddenly branched off on a course which was nearly due east; and when Luh-hwa noticed that they had left the beaten track, and asked the reason, Ah-choi merely smiled and said they were going to make a detour in order to avoid bad roads.

All that day they rode on at a brisk pace, only pausing now and again to rest the horses and take a little refreshment, and at nightfall they arrived at the large town of Ju-yuen, having traversed a distance of about forty miles.

They engaged a room between them in the most respectable hostel they could find, and the proprietor's wife, who was a hard-featured woman of about fifty, made herself very agreeable, particularly to Ah-choi, with whom she soon became on intimate terms. Luh-hwa felt thoroughly worn out and wretched, and, after partaking of a cup of tea

and a little rice and salt-fish, she retired to rest, Ah-choi promising to join her later on.

Being a warm night she opened the double window of her sleeping apartment, which led out upon a covered verandah that ran across the entire back of the house.

Her heart was full of strange forebodings, and for some time she lay tossing about upon her couch ; but at length she fell into a troubled sleep from which she awoke about one o'clock in the morning, and was surprised to find that her step-mother had not yet come to bed. While wondering what had detained her, she heard voices, one of which she recognised as Ah-choi's, proceeding from the next room ; so, getting up, she crept out on the verandah and, taking a few steps, peeped through an open window and saw Ah-choi and the proprietor's wife gambling with dominoes, each having a little stack of silver at her elbow. Most Chinese ladies are more or less addicted to this vice, and Luh-hwa knew that Ah-choi was particularly partial to it ; but what amazed her was that she should gamble with an utter stranger, and should risk losing their money when they had no apparent means of obtaining more when the little they possessed was exhausted. While she was timidly watching the play, she heard the innkeeper's wife remark that it was a long journey to Shanghai and ask why Ah-choi was going there.

"Well," replied the latter, "I passed most of my younger days at Shanghai, and have some friends there."

"But," said the woman, "would it not be far quicker for you to go direct to Canton, and from there by ship to Shanghai?"

"No doubt it would be quicker," said Ah-choi, "but I have particular reasons for not wishing to go to Canton."

As poor Luh-hwa heard these words, she staggered back into her room, and, with a stifled sob, flung herself across the bed and wept. She knew now that she would probably never again see her dear brother; and what would become of him and her? But not for a moment did she dream of thwarting the will of her stepmother, whose word was law, and whose influence was of gradual growth and long standing, and was interwoven with her religious convictions. For the one was a helpless superstitious girl, and the other a crafty woman of the world, who had for years been drawing the meshes of her net around this gentle, trustful creature, who would have feared the vengeance of hell had she disobeyed her.

Luh-hwa must have sobbed herself into a state almost bordering upon unconsciousness, since she remained for quite an hour in the same position as that in which she had thrown herself in her first paroxysm of grief; and at two o'clock she did not hear her stepmother's soft footfall as she entered the room with a lamp, though she was soon recalled to her senses by her voice.

"By all the demons!—what is the matter, child?" said Ah-choi in a sharp, irritable manner, which showed that she was in a bad temper, no doubt having lost heavily.

Rising from the bed, Luh-hwa stood before her, and her piteous, appealing look was enough to have softened the hardest heart.

"Oh, tell me, Ah-choi," she said pleadingly, "why are we not going to Canton?"

"Who put that notion into your head?" asked the other angrily.

"Do not be hasty with me," said Luh-hwa, nervously clasping and unclasping her hands. "I wondered why you had not come to bed, and, happening to hear your voice, I went out on the verandah, and while looking into the room where you were sitting, heard you say that you had particular reasons for not wishing to go to Canton."

"So you have been eavesdropping!" said Ah-choi, pertinaciously; "and pray did you hear anything more?"

"I heard the woman you were playing with ask why you were going to Shanghai."

"Yes, and to Shanghai we are going!" reported Ah-choi, vehemently; "and that horrid woman would not alter my purpose, nor you either!"

"Oh, Ah-choi," pleaded the young girl, falling upon her knees, "be kind to me and let me go to my brother!—let me see him once again!"

"You shall see him, child," said Ah-choi, softening somewhat, though speaking impatiently. "When we get to Shanghai, I will send for him, and he will come to you. Surely you will trust me?"

"Yes, I will trust you," said Luh-hwa with a sigh, rising and wiping her tears; and then, finding that her stepmother was not in a humour for further conversation, she composed herself and went to sleep.

Next morning they continued their journey at nine o'clock, the inn-keeper's wife not again appearing upon the scene; and as Ah-choi was in a bad mood Luh-hwa did not venture to trouble her with more questions, lest she should further provoke her wrath, of which she stood in much fear,

particularly as it had been so seldom shown before.

That evening they stopped at a small village, some thirty-five miles to the eastward of Ju-yuen, where they passed the night; and in this manner they gradually travelled onward towards the distant seaboard of Fuhkien. As they proceeded on their way Ah-choi's gambling propensities became more and more pronounced, and Luh-hwa was soon able to tell by her looks and demeanour whether she had lost or won. But, unfortunately for both, Ah-choi was not often successful in her bold ventures, and, much to poor Luh-hwa's sorrow and consternation, their money rapidly dwindled away, the elder woman having it all in her own possession, which made her charge all the more dependent upon her. But the young girl's gentle remonstrances were utterly unheeded and in vain, and this thriftless woman only became more reckless when warned, seeming to have abandoned herself entirely to the excitement of the hour, and to have lost all thought of the future.

At times, when she was in luck's way, she would be all kindness and solicitude, and Luh-hwa would cling to the hope that she might recover her losses and stop playing, Ah-choi having often promised to do so; but these hopes were rudely dispelled one after another, and at last the poor girl became very fearful of the future, and quite despaired of ever seeing her brother again; for if her stepmother could so persistently break her word in one respect, she might do so in another.

After a journey of three hundred and seventy miles, which had occupied twenty-six days, during which time they had passed through many villages, besides the towns and cities of Ju-yuen, Ten-yuen,

Ping-yen, Nantsin and Han-chu, they arrived one afternoon at the treaty-port of Amoy. Here all was bustle and traffic, and in striking contrast with the languor and quietude of inland cities. After riding some distance through the crowded thoroughfares, they stopped at a second-rate Chinese hotel where Ah-choi discharged the driver and took a room for herself and Luh-hwa, the latter being very fatigued and down-hearted, feeling so alone in the world and so estranged from all she held most dear.

After a simple meal Ah-choi went out alone, and in an hour's time returned and told Luh-hwa that she wished to engage a berth for themselves aboard a steamer which was sailing on the morrow for Shanghai, but that in order to do so and to pay for their board and lodgings at the hotel, she would have to sell some of their jewellery. She therefore asked Luh-hwa to give her the solid gold and pearl earrings she wore and some other trinkets, including the gold ring which Montrose had sent her, and which she had worn upon the second finger of her left hand since leaving home, Ah-choi believing that it had been presented to her by Mrs. Lao, the amah through whom it had been sent by the Englishman.

Poor Luh-hwa silently took from her ears the pair of earrings she was wearing, and from a small casket the rest of her jewellery, and handed them to Ah-choi; but when the latter also wanted the ring, she shook her head and said she would rather die than part with it. So taking these valuables, which would fetch more than enough for their present requirements, Ah-choi again left the hotel and did not return until after dark, when she

smilingly informed Luh-hwa that next morning they would sail in a beautiful foreign vessel for Shanghai. She was very affable and affectionate to her stepdaughter that evening, and gave a glowing description of all they would see in the great European settlement, where—according to her own statement—money was plentiful and people generous. Luh-hwa quietly listened to all she said, and now and again forced a wan smile into her face in order to appear happy and hopeful; but her heart was heavy and despondent, and she was glad when the time came for them to retire to bed—for there she could hide her tell-tale tears, and live again in the past.

Next morning they went aboard the steamer *Quinsan*, which was lying at anchor in the harbour, and the sight was a novel one to Luh-hwa, who had never before seen the sea or a ship of any size. The berth which Ah-choi had engaged was in the between-decks, a portion of which was filled with cargo, so that the place was unpleasantly close and unclean.

At noon the vessel proceeded on her way north, and, as there was a choppy sea running in the Formosa Channel, she rolled considerably, much inconveniencing the ladies, particularly Luh-hwa, who suffered severely from nausea and was obliged to keep to her bunk during the greater part of the passage. But, on the morning of the third day after leaving, she was relieved, on being awakened by Ah-choi, to find that they were gliding through smooth water with river-banks close along-side; and soon afterwards pretty, Italian-like villas began to appear, gradually increasing in number until large warehouses were seen, and then the steamer

slowed down and came to her moorings against the Ningpo wharf, which was alive with coolies and foreigners.

Being told by her stepmother to put on her best clothes, Luh-hwa did so, and then a burly coolie came down and shouldered their luggage, and they followed him over the gangway and on to the wharf, where Ah-choi engaged a couple of rickshas, which are like miniature hansom-cabs, only a Chinaman stands between the shafts and takes the place of a horse.

This mode of conveyance was quite new to Luh-hwa who held to the sides of the vehicle with considerable interest as the stalwart coolie gripped the shafts near the end, raising them to a level with his waist, made a few preliminary hops and jerky pulls, and settled down into a swift and steady trot which soon carried her through shop-lined Hongkew and over the Garden Bridge.

Turning down the Foochow Road they stopped at a Chinese house where some of Ah-choi's friends had formerly lived, but they had left some years ago and their whereabouts was unknown. Then they drove to another house in the Ningpo-road, but with similar results, and at length they took a room in a small hotel, and had some refreshment. After that Ah-choi went out alone, promising to return in the evening and conduct Luh-hwa round the town; so the latter took from her valise a book of Su Tung-po's poems, and, while resting upon a couch, diverted her mind as much as possible from the thoughts with which it was harassed.

Ah-choi returned to the hotel shortly before seven, and they sat down to their last meal. That evening she was particularly kind and agreeable

to her stepdaughter, for whom she had bought a new silk dress, and after supper she asked her to put it on and to come with her to see the Settlement, and to visit a kind lady with whom she wished her to stop for a little while. So a couple of rickshas were engaged, and into one of them Luh-hwa and her luggage were deposited, and then they drove away, both conveyances keeping side by side so that the occupants could converse.

By this time the English Settlement had undergone a great transformation, and as they turned into the Bund, along which smart landaus, dog-carts, and other equipages were dashing, Luh-hwa made an exclamation of wonder and admiration; for the whole place was illuminated by electric light which threw a pale meteoric effulgence over road, river, and buildings, giving a fairy-like touch to everything, particularly the groves of trees on either side of the broad thoroughfare, near which—beyond a strip of sloping lawn—shimmered the Huang-pu river upon the calm, shadowy surface of which boats and junks drifted to and fro.

Never before had that inexperienced young girl seen anything approaching to the beauty and grandeur of the scene which now met her enraptured gaze, and for a time she forgot her troubles and revelled in this wonderland. The very air seemed laden with sweet perfumes and melodious sounds, for the Town Band was discoursing sweet music in the Public Garden, which was not only filled with elegant and richly-apparelled European ladies, but with the most choice and fragrant flowers.

"What a beautiful place," said Luh-hwa after a time; "it is all so grand and wonderful."

"Yes, my dear, and you are going to live here,"

replied Ah-choi, adding in a gentle, persuasive voice, "we will now turn and drive to the lady with whom you are going to stay."

"But surely you are not going to leave me?" asked, Luh-hwa, in some alarm.

"Oh, no, my dear—only for a little while," Ah-choi replied affectionately; "and you will have such nice companions, for there are three or four young girls about your own age living in the same house."

This somewhat mollified Luh-hwa, who continued to silently contemplate their surroundings as they were whirled back along the Bund towards the French Concession, which was a gloomy, badly-lighted place.

"Oh, this is not at all nice," remarked Luh-hwa, disappointedly, as they crossed the bridge spanning the Yan-kin Pang Creek and, turning to the right, entered a less imposing neighbourhood where nearly every other building was a dancing-saloon or rum-mill from whence proceeded rude sounds of drunken revelry. And now and again she was shocked and surprised to see gaudily-dressed females with painted faces sitting at the doors of certain houses, while some of them were conversing with rough-looking foreigners, most of whom were sailors or firemen from the various ships in port.

But imagine her amazement and consternation when they suddenly stopped at one of these brothels, and Ah-choi smilingly invited her to come inside with her, and told the ricksha coolie to follow with her valise.

Two young girls with thin, painted faces, who were seated at the door of the house, got up and

welcomed them, their dialect being that of the Hakka class of Cantonese, to which most of the Southern boat-people belong; and an ugly old woman emerged from the interior and was profuse in her salutations.

"Come, my dear young lady," she said in a croaking voice, taking Luh-hwa's hand and leading her into the front room, "let me see a smile on that pretty face of yours, for you are going to stay with me for awhile."

But Luh-hwa was shy and reserved, and, moreover, she did not like the manner and appearance of the woman any more than her surroundings. The latter handed her a box of bon-bons and then went into the next room with Ah-choi, though the walls were so thin, being merely wooden partitions, that she could have heard every word they said had they not conversed in an undertone.

The apartment in which Luh-hwa sat was not commodious, nor altogether furnished in Chinese style, as common English prints and coloured pictures adorned the walls, and a foreign-made table and several chairs figured among the furniture; and standing against the inner wall was a large box containing an image of Keang-neang (Our Lady), the fox-elf demon which is often worshipped by poor, deluded Chinese prostitutes, who believe that it has the power to transform itself into a lovely woman who can fascinate all men, and in consequence can impart this magic art of bewitching to those who pay it homage.

While Luh-hwa was wondering why she had been brought to this strange house, one of the girls from outside passed through the room in company with a foreign sailor who, on seeing

Luh-hwa, paused and was about to accost her when his companion pulled him away and conducted him upstairs.

This incident very much alarmed the poor girl, who was about to seek refuge in the adjoining apartment when she was somewhat reassured by hearing Ah-choi's voice which was accompanied with the clink of money, and shortly afterwards the latter and the old woman emerged from the next room and approached her.

"Now, my dear Luh-hwa," said Ah-choi, who was holding something beneath her jacket, "I must leave you for a time in charge of this good woman, who will take every care of you; and, in my absence, you must be obedient to her."

"Oh, pray do not leave me here!" pleaded Luh-hwa, clinging to her with all the energy of despair. "Indeed, I will do anything, or live anywhere, if you will not forsake me!"

"Don't be so stupid, Luh-hwa!" answered the stepmother sharply and impatiently, "I cannot take you with me now."

But Luh-hwa, who began to fear foul play, frantically held on to her clothing; and when the old brothel-keeper—who was now her mistress, she having been sold into bondage—came forward and with honied words, though determined action, unclosed the slender fingers and drew her away, she gave a shrill cry and fell to the ground in a swoon.*

* It is a common thing in China for the female children of poor or ruined parents to be sold into brothels, many of the unfortunate girls being of good parentage, refined tastes, and exceeding comeliness, though the life they are forced to lead soon ages and changes them. In Shanghai and elsewhere on the China coast there are numbers of licensed houses of this description.

Two bags of money were quickly deposited in Ah-choi's ricksha, and she at once drove away. Then the old hag, whose name was Piao, gently placed her prize upon a couch, and, while bathing her temples with cold water, contemplated her rare charms with the eye of a connoisseur, and secretly chuckled and congratulated herself upon this profitable investment.

At length Luh-hwa recovered consciousness and found herself alone with her future mistress, whom she regarded with ill-concealed aversion and distrust.

"Let me see, my dear, I forget your name," said Piao.

"Hung Luh-hwa," she answered dejectedly.

"And a very pretty name it is too, my dear," said the woman, with an insinuating smile, "as pretty as your sweet face, which will make all the great gentlemen go madly in love with you and give you all manner of rich jewels and fine gowns."

Luh-hwa shuddered and recoiled from the looks and language of this evil creature, and the terrible truth of her helpless position began to dawn upon her.

"I do not want riches," she answered coldly and wearily. "I only want to live a good life and to be with my brother."

"And very natural too, my dear," said Piao, rising; "and no doubt you feel tired to-night and would like to go to bed."

The woman called the girl who was sitting outside, whose name was Fah-lu, and told her to show Luh-hwa up to her room.

The latter was pleased to escape the unwelcome attentions of that horrid old woman, and gladly

followed Fah-lu upstairs to a small apartment which was furnished in European style and had a comfortable double-bed.

"I wish I were you and could go to bed now," said Fah-lu, "for I am very tired and have had no luck to-night."

"No luck?" reiterated Luh-hwa in surprise; "what do you mean?"

"Oh, you will learn soon enough," said Fah-lu, with a meaning smile: "but you are beautiful, and will get some great *taipan* who will keep you like a lady and pay the mistress handsomely every month."

"I do not intend to get married," answered Luh-hwa, quietly and firmly.

"No," said her companion, "and I don't suppose old Piao means to let you get married."

"Who is this woman that I am to obey her?" asked Luh-hwa, indignantly.

"She is your mistress," replied the girl, doggedly, "just as much as she is my mistress; and she has paid two bags full of good silver dollars for you."

With a moan of anguish, Luh-hwa buried her face in the bed and wept as if her heart would break; and the poor, ignorant creature who had caused this anguish by revealing the naked truth, came to her side and with womanly feeling placed her arm around her and tearfully endeavoured to make amends by cheering and consoling her. But nothing that she said or did alleviated the sufferings or lightened the terrible burden which had so suddenly fallen upon that delicate and sensitive girl; so finding her efforts unavailing, and not daring to remain longer upstairs, Fah-lu left

the room. And at length that forlorn victim of a stepmother's greed and treachery crept into her bed, and there in her misery and blank despair prayed to the gods to protect her from the evils with which she was threatened and surrounded—surrounded, indeed, for, while she lay there in the loneliness and fearfulness of her sorrow, she heard about her the gruff voices and hoarse laughter of drunken men and abandoned women.

Next morning all was quiet in the house until about eleven o'clock, when the occupants began to rise, though Luh-hwa, who had been awake and dressed since an early hour, did not dare to leave her room. At length, however, Fah-lu knocked at the door and brought her a basin of rice and fish and a cup of tea, and told her that she could do what she liked until the evening, and that she, Fah-lu, would take her out for a walk if she cared to see the town.

"Go for a walk in the streets!" exclaimed Luh-hwa, in surprise, speaking in a nervous, dejected manner. "No, thank you. I will remain indoors, though it is very kind of you to have asked me."

Then Fah-lu began to chat to her confidentially, saying that there were now four girls in the house, including Luh-hwa, and that they were free during the day. One of them, named Ha-sen, was the mistress of a Customs man.

"No one cares for me though," added the poor creature, "and yet I pray night and morning to Keang-neang to give me favour and comeliness in the eyes of men. Ha-sen is a great favourite with them and brings the mistress a lot of money; but she is not half so pretty as you, I heard Piao say so last night."

Luh-hwa listened in a dazed, horrified manner to this strange talk, and appeared to regard the speaker with much pity and not a little contempt, for the girl seemed to have lost all shame and all sense of virtue and propriety.

"Have you no father or mother living?" she asked eagerly, wishing to change the subject.

"Not that I know of," answered the girl, as if puzzled by the question. "I was sold to Piao when I was quite a child, and she has brought me up."

"Poor Fah-lu!" murmured Luh-hwa pityingly, her reserve suddenly breaking down; and then the two lone children of a cruel fate for a time mingled their tears and commiserated one another, for that one query had brought to poor Fah-lu's unthinking mind a pang of remorse and shame.

Throughout the day Luh-hwa was allowed to remain alone in her room, and as the house was quiet she had no cause for alarm; but, as darkness set in, she became nervous, and not without reason, for she again heard the gruff voices of men, and now and then their heavy footsteps upon the stairs and in the passage outside her room. But for some time she was left undisturbed, and she was beginning to hope that things would continue thus when the mistress sent Fah-lu with a message to say that she wished Luh-hwa to put on her best clothes and go downstairs.

"You had better do what she says," whisperingly added the girl, "for so long as you do not vex her she is all right: but she can be a tiger if she likes."

With beating heart and trembling hands Luh-hwa arrayed herself in the new gown which Ah-choi had bought her, and then descended the stairs, at the bottom of which she was met by Piao, who

was dressed in a black, glazed-silk jacket and a divided-skirt of the same material.

"Come, my dear," she said, taking Luh-hwa by the hand, "I want you to come out with me."

Then seeing that she was wearing no jewellery, the old woman went upstairs, leaving Luh-hwa waiting in the front room, and soon returned with a thick pair of gold earrings with a pearl in the centre of each.

"Put these on, my dear," she said, handing them to Luh-hwa, "for I want you to look nice."

The girl silently and sorrowfully obeyed, but did not look in a glass which was hanging near, to see whether they improved her appearance; for at that moment she would have been glad to be ugly.

"That's better, my dear," said Piao admiringly, taking her hand and leading her into the street, where a large, double-seated ricksha was waiting.

Both got into the vehicle and were rapidly borne away into the English Settlement, the old woman doing all she could to enliven her companion with absurd flattery and promises of rich presents; but this gushing, insincere adulation only made Luh-hwa dislike and distrust the woman all the more.

Turning into the Kiangsi Road, they stopped at a European-built house. Here they alighted, and Piao rang the bell and led Luh-hwa up a flight of steps to the front door, which was opened by a quiet Chinese boy, who exchanged a few words with the old woman and then conducted them into a small, sumptuously furnished apartment, where they were left alone for some minutes. Then the door was opened by a tall, middle-aged man in evening dress. He was evidently of Scandinavian

With a cry of startled indignation she sprang to her feet and rushed towards the door. He intercepted her, and, catching her by the arm, he said, "and then by the waist, tried to force her into the room."

her resistance seriously and persisted in the assault. But as she again raised her voice and, with a frantic wrench, tore his silk dress-jacket, he angrily flung her from him. Immediately afterwards the door was opened and Piao appeared upon the threshold.

"Take this she-cat away!" he vociferated, stamping his foot, evidently much enraged. "I no wanchee this bobbery (noise) and fool pidgin!"

"Bime-by she all quiet," said Piao apologetically; "she no savee."

"Take her away, I say!" he retorted, opening the door and motioning them to leave the room.

"I will not stay here," said Luh-hwa, trying to push past the woman.

Piao's face suddenly became contorted with anger, and grasping her by the wrist she simply dragged her out of the house and down the steps and, with threats and execrations, shoved her into the ricksha and then got in herself.

"You vile little toad! You little viper!" she hissed, thrusting her infuriated face into Luh-hwa's and shaking her clenched hand menacingly. "I will make you suffer: by all the demons in hell, I will!"

With blanched face and trembling limbs poor Luh-hwa silently endured this storm of abuse and vituperation, which seemed to grow more violent as they proceeded.

On arriving back at the brothel the old hag sprang from the ricksha with devilish agility and, while shrieking curses, clawed Luh-hwa by the hair and pulled her inside. In a moment she grasped a short thick bamboo cane and, holding the poor girl with one hand, unmercifully belaboured her

with the other. But not a word or cry escaped Luh-hwa's lips, from which drops of blood fell as she bit them in her shame and agony.

So blind with rage was Piao, that she had actually forgotten to shut the front door, which stood wide open, so that people in the street could see what was going on inside the room, and quite a crowd began to collect. Suddenly a gentleman, who happened to be passing, sprang into the room.

"Wretch! would you kill this poor creature?" he cried, throwing the old hag aside and freeing Luh-hwa, who for a moment stood like one petrified. Then, as her eyes met those of her protector she gave a little cry, and, covering her face, would have fallen had he not supported her.

"Luh-hwa! Luh-hwa! can it be you?" he exclaimed, eagerly bending over her unconscious form; and, as he gently laid her upon a settee, his gaze fell upon a ring which had once been his: for he was Montrose.

While Luh-hwa was still insensible he turned and demanded of her mistress how it was that this poor innocent lady had fallen into her clutches. And Piao, who was somewhat cowed and still panting from her exertions, told him that she had honestly bought the girl from a woman named Ah-choi, and that she was her legal property. In support of her claim, she produced a receipt and her licence.

"Licence or no licence," he answered firmly, speaking in Cantonese, "this lady shall not sleep another night under your roof."

"But she is mine, sir," urged the woman, growing more bold, "for I paid eight hundred and fifty dollars for her."

"Your dollars shall be returned with interest," said Montrose, decisively, "but this lady comes with me."

Without taking further heed of the old wretch, Montrose bestowed all his attention upon Luh-hwa, who soon began to regain consciousness; and, when she did, it was to find her hand tenderly clasped in that of the very man whose memory she had so fondly cherished.

"Luh-hwa," he whispered, regarding her with earnest solicitude, "do you remember me?"

"Yes," she replied, colouring deeply, and adding with passionate entreaty, "Oh, pray take me from this horrible place: do not leave me here."

"Trust me, I will not leave you or lose you again," he said, adding impulsively, "Thank Heaven that I have rescued you in time!"

While he had been attending to Luh-hwa, Piao had left the house and called to her assistance a *gendarme*, who entered the front room with her, and speaking in broken English, asked Montrose what he meant by interfering with the woman who was a licensed brothel-keeper.

Montrose answered the officer in French, explaining the cause of his intervention and giving his reason for wishing to remove the unfortunate girl from the house.

The man's demeanour at once changed to one of bland politeness, but he said that Montrose could not forcibly remove the lady in question, as it would be tantamount to abducting her; but that, if the brothel-keeper liked to give her consent, no further objection would be raised. Whereupon Montrose turned to Piao and said that if she was willing to come to terms, he would refund the

purchase money paid for Miss Hung and give a reasonable indemnity.

At first Piao would not hear of this proposition ; but at length, seeing that Montrose was determined and that Luh-hwa was likely to give great trouble and perhaps escape, or commit suicide, she asked the *gendarme* to step outside, at the same time surreptitiously handing him some money. Then inviting the Englishman to take a seat, and closing the outer door, she also sat down, and the parleying commenced, poor Luh-hwa in the meantime reclining upon the settee, an eager and deeply-concerned witness of the negotiations which would decide her fate.

At last it was agreed upon that Montrose should pay one thousand four hundred dollars ; but, as it was now past eleven o'clock at night, it would be impossible to conclude the transaction before the next day, and Piao obstinately refused to allow Luh-hwa to quit the premises until the whole amount had been paid in Mexican dollars.

"Then I will stay here to-night," said Montrose, with calm resolution. And stay he did.

Rising from the table, he went to Luh-hwa and took her hand.

"You can trust me, can you not?" he asked gently.

"I can, because you are kind and good," she replied simply.

"Then show me to your room."

For a moment she hesitated, and then, looking into his face, she placed her hand in his, in a childlike, trustful manner, and led him upstairs to her apartment ; and as they entered it her pale face turned scarlet.

"It is very dreadful that I should have to bring you here," she said timidly, "but I have no other room, and you have saved me from death; for I would have died by mine own hand sooner than obey that wicked woman."

Besides the sleeping accommodation and dressing-table there were two chairs in the apartment, and upon these they seated themselves and conversed for fully an hour; and great was poor Luh-hwa's delight when she heard that Montrose knew her brother and might yet be able to bring them together. On the other hand, Montrose was grievously distressed on learning the terrible calamity which had befallen the Hung family, and he feared and sorrowed for Cheng lest he should have fallen into the hands of the villainous Taotai of Lien.

At length he rose to bid her good-night and, as he clasped her hand, she looked fondly and wistfully into his face.

"You will not go far away from me, will you?" she asked, tremulously.

"Trust me, Luh-hwa, and sleep soundly and fearlessly," he said in a kind, chivalrous manner, raising to his lips the small hand which rested confidingly in his. "I will not move from your door, where I shall keep watch until morning."

"Oh, it is such a bad, nasty place for you to stay in," she said apologetically, smiling shyly, and in every way evincing her reliance and gratitude.

Taking a chair from her room he went out and, closing the door, seated himself in front of it, so that no one could enter the apartment without disturbing him. He had not been seated long when

a drunken, quarrelsome sailor, accompanied by one of the girls belonging to the house, passed him and roughly demanded what he was doing there ; but his companion managed to hustle him away, and for the remainder of the night all was quiet. Nevertheless it was a long and weary vigil, though towards morning Montrose gained a little sleep, and he was glad indeed when day dawned. Yet he did not leave his post until Luh-hwa opened the door and greeted him with a winsome smile and a few grateful words. She was dressed in her best clothes, and looked very fresh and beautiful.

"To think that this sweet, innocent creature should have ever been brought to such a horrible den as this," he involuntarily soliloquised, looking into her face and reading in her large eyes the secret of her heart.

"I see you have kept the ring I sent you," he remarked, raising her left hand ; "and I hope, for my sake, that you will always wear it."

"I will never remove it from my hand," she answered with sweet simplicity, "for it will remind me of your great kindness."

"And of my gratitude to you," he added seriously.

At ten o'clock it was arranged that while Piao accompanied Montrose to the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank, Luh-hwa should be left in charge of a *gendarme*. So one of the guardians of the French Concession was called in and he complacently pocketed a dollar "cumshaw" and, taking a seat, regaled himself upon bottled beer. Then Montrose and the "mistress" drove away in rickshas and, on arriving at the bank, he drew the

stipulated number of dollars, and, in the presence of the cashier, handed them over to her, she giving a receipt for the amount. Then the money was lifted into the woman's ricksha, and they drove back to the brothel, which was fortunately situated in a street where there was little traffic, and which was comparatively deserted in the daytime.

During their absence Luh-hwa had retired to her room, but directly she heard that Montrose had returned, she came downstairs, carrying her valise.

"You are free, Luh-hwa," said Montrose, going forward and taking her hand, which trembled with the excitement she was endeavouring to suppress.

"I thank you! I thank you!" she murmured fervently as he led her out of the house and assisted her into a ricksha.

They at once drove away into the English Settlement, and turning down the Bubbling-well Road at length stopped before a large bungalow standing in commodious grounds. Here Montrose asked Luh-hwa to wait, while he saw his friends and made arrangements for her reception.

Entering the house, which was the residence of Mrs. Brancome, he saw his old friend to whom he explained everything, and asked if she would mind allowing Luh-hwa to live with her until he had communicated with her brother or made other plans for her maintenance.

Mrs. Brancome, expressing much pity for the unfortunate girl, replied that she would be only too pleased to receive her as a guest. So Luh-hwa was most cordially welcomed by the English lady, who, however, could not speak Chinese and was unable to converse with her except through a Cantonese amah, who acted as interpreter.

Montrose, who was staying in lodgings close by, seemed delighted to have found the sweet, charitable girl who had served him so fondly and faithfully when he was sorely wounded and alone among strangers and enemies, and he contrived to visit her frequently.

In her own quiet, modest way she showed that she reciprocated his affection, though for the first few days she was shy and reserved when in his presence. But this gradually wore off and they became firm friends.

There was a spacious garden at the back of the Brancome's house, and here in the balmy September evenings she and Montrose would often spend many happy hours together. He never seemed tired of exploring the depths of her strangely-tutored, deep-musing mind, and used to let his thoughts go wandering away with her to the glories and mysteries of the mighty past, which held such charms for her. And those long-lashed eyes of hers would light up with becoming animation as she credulously related some quaint tradition or historic fable in which an artful old fox invariably popped up most unexpectedly and worked much mischief by transforming itself into a mortal, or a fairy, or a very frolicsome elf.

In this pleasant manner a month passed, though in the meantime Mrs. Brancome's feelings towards Luh-hwa had undergone a great change; for although advantageously married, she secretly regretted that she had not been true to her early engagement with Montrose, and it wounded her vanity and mortified her to see this Chinese girl engage so much of his time and attention. Nevertheless she was careful to conceal her feelings,

and, to all appearances, was quite as friendly and well-disposed towards the beautiful young orphan as she had been at first.

One morning, soon after breakfast, Montrose called to see Luh-hwa, and, leading her into the garden, told her that he was obliged to go south to Swatow for a couple or three weeks, as a missionary friend of his was ill and had urgently requested his assistance.

While he was speaking Luh-hwa's face turned pale and sorrowful, and she stole wistful glances at his, as if trying to discover whether he was also sad. But his looks belied his feelings, for he was endeavouring to appear as cheerful as possible, so her heart sank in dismay and she was silent.

"I shall soon be back, Luh-hwa," he said gently, looking into her tell-tale eyes, "and I am sure that my friends will continue to treat you with every kindness.

"But while I am absent," he added, taking her left hand into his and removing the ring he had given her to the wedding-finger, "may this keepsake remain where I now place it?"

"Yes, it may," she answered with a pensive smile.

But the ring was too large for that finger, so taking from her pocket a piece of silk thread she wound it round the hoop and made it fit, though without knowing the significance of his action.* He, on the other hand, thought that it was understood by her, though he wondered a little at the unconscious simplicity of her manner. And when

* The Chinese do not use engagement rings. Sometimes the accepted suitor will send a bangle or bracelet to the lady whom he intends to marry, though this has no particular meaning.

about to unburden himself of a secret which was alike cherished by both, and which would have revealed to her the true meaning of his request and her compliance, he heard footsteps approaching behind them. It was Laura Brancome.

"I am sorry to disturb your *tête-à-tête*, Mr. Montrose," she said acrimoniously, "but before you leave I should like to have a few words with you."

"With pleasure, Mrs. Brancome; I will come now," he said, taking Luh-hwa's hand, and, in the presence of this lady, bidding her good-bye; and thus they parted.

When he had gone and Luh-hwa was alone, she seated herself upon a rustic bench, and fondly, though tearfully, dwelt upon those happy days that had passed. She had been there for about an hour when Mrs. Brancome's amah appeared and, seating herself beside her, opened the conversation by asking inquisitive questions to which she replied with marked reserve, particularly when the woman touched upon her friendship with the missionary.

"Oh, it is no use your not confessing that you love him," said the amah, playfully shaking her finger, "my mistress knows you do. But don't fret and worry yourself, my dear young lady, because it will only make you ill and will do no good, for he does not mean to marry you. No Englishman ever weds a Chinese woman."

"How do you know that he will never marry me?" asked Luh-hwa, colouring guiltily, yet proudly resenting this woman's familiarity which had not been manifested until then.

"Because my mistress says so," promptly

retorted the woman, "and she has known Mr. Montrose since she was a girl."

"I thank you for having informed me of this," said Luh-hwa coldly, rising and gulping down a sob of despair.

Leaving the amah, she walked to the further end of the garden, and again seated herself near a grove of trees which bordered a lane leading out of the main road. She did not doubt but that what the woman had said was true, for she was so honest and trustful herself that she never suspected others of falsehood; and now she felt a wild desire to flee from that place, so that she might never again see Montrose. For it would only break her heart to be with him and to know that her love was unreturned. It would be better, she reasoned, to go to work honestly and hide her secret, than to idly hope and dream and obsequiously wait until he came back; for were her passion known to him, perhaps he would despise and resent her, and that would be unbearable. She might find her brother and with his assistance make sufficient money to refund to the young Englishman that which he had given to redeem her from bondage. For her heart, though broken, was proud and sensitive, and her honour was unblemished, and she knew she was worthy to be his bride.

Her sad meditations were now disturbed by the luncheon gong, so she returned to the house and found Mrs. Brancome seated at the table, her husband not being present, as he generally remained in town until the evening. The amah was also sitting in the room and was nursing an infant on this occasion. Laura Brancome was particularly amiable to Luh-hwa and, through the mediumship

of her Cantonese servant, conversed with her upon various topics, though not at first mentioning Montrose. At length, however, just as they were about to rise from the table, she casually remarked that it was quite possible that he might be married to an English lady in Swatow, and return with his bride to Shanghai.

The poor girl made no response, though her heightened colour must have shown Mrs. Brancome that her shaft had pierced to the heart. Then, smiling with vindictive satisfaction, the lady left the room. Of course, what she had said about Montrose was wholly without foundation; though had he afterwards taxed her about it she could have passed it off as a joke, since he happened to be acquainted with two missionary ladies in Swatow.

Luh-hwa returned to her leafy retreat at the end of the garden, and, being alone in her anguish, she buried her face in her hands and allowed her pent-up feelings to find vent in tears.

Suddenly she heard a familiar voice calling her and, looking up, she saw Ah-choi standing in the lane and looking through the hedge.

"Come and speak to me, for you seem sad, my dear," said the latter in a soft, sympathetic voice. "I have been watching and waiting to see you for two days."

Rising to her feet Luh-hwa approached her stepmother, who was wearing a green shade over her eyes; and although the hedge formed a barrier between them, it was only a fragile one, and Ah-choi at once held aside the foliage and advanced to meet her.

"I am indeed unhappy, and no wonder," said Luh-hwa, reproachfully, adding with passionate

energy, "Oh, why did you sell me to that wicked woman?"

"Sell you, my dear Luh-hwa!" exclaimed the woman with feigned surprise; "I merely borrowed some money of her, and left you there as some sort of a security until I returned.

"I know you are not happy here, my dear," she continued, "so you had better come with me. For, as you know, my eyes were always weak, and I am fast losing my sight; and what should I do were I to go blind, and have no one to take care of me?"

"Come, dear Luh-hwa," she added plaintively, seeing the girl hesitate, "I will be kind and good to you: for I am now your mother, and it is your duty not to forsake me."

"If I come with you," said Luh-hwa with grave earnestness, "you must promise never to leave me again, and never to take me back to that wicked woman; for, if you do, I will take opium and die."

"I swear never to leave you, dear," said Ah-choi, tenderly, "but you must not let your friends see you come with me. When it gets dark I will wait for you at this spot with a couple of rickshas, and you can bring your valise."

Luh-hwa promised to be ready at nine o'clock, and they parted, Ah-choi slipping away through the hedge near which a ricksha was waiting.

Poor Luh-hwa went back to the house and going to her room made secret preparations for departure. She would never have left those who had befriended her, had she not believed that her love for the young Englishman was hopeless and unreturned; moreover, she was too proud and far too susceptible to bear the humiliation of seeing

her lover return with another woman as his bride. On the other hand it must not be forgotten that Ah-choi exercised a potent influence over her—an influence which was based upon the traditions and superstitions which had been interwoven with her home-life, and which she held most sacred.

But she did not blame Montrose: no, she was too noble and generous for that; nor did she give a thought to what she had done for him. She only bitterly reproved herself for her foolishness and presumption in thinking that he cared for her—her, a poor, friendless, destitute girl whom he had rescued from a brothel. And while she thought these things her face blushed crimson, and with a deep sigh and trembling hands she gathered her few worldly belongings together, and looked mournfully forward to the time when darkness should come and cover her unhappy flight. *

That night, shortly after nine o'clock, when Mr. and Mrs. Brancome were sitting on the front verandah of the house, the luckless girl took her valise, and, stealing out into the garden, made her way to the appointed rendezvous, where she found Ah-choi anxiously awaiting her. Passing out of the grounds they drove away into the darkness, and that was the last that was heard of poor Luh-hwa for many a long day.

* Detective Inspector Stanton, late of Hongkong, and author of "The Triad Society," and "The Chinese Drama," writes:—"The treatment of your heroine by her father's concubine and her career in Shanghai is true to life. People who do not know the Chinese might think that Luh-hwa would never return to the wretch of a concubine again, but I can say, after as much experience of such cases as most persons have had, that it is just what a Chinese girl would be almost certain to do."

CHAPTER XX

AN OUTCAST

During the forenoon of a beautiful day in autumn a solitary horseman approached the walls of Lien. As the reader will no doubt have guessed, the traveller was none other than our young friend, Hung Fong Cheng, who, on the previous night, had sent the faithful Ah Sam forward with a message to his parents and Mr. Wong A-chih to give them notice of his approach and tidings of his success.

He was beginning to wonder why his family and clansmen had not yet appeared to greet him when he perceived a man standing beneath an isolated tree and making signs to him. Urging his jade horse forward he soon recognised his venerable tutor, Wong A-chih.

"My noble Ah-tin," said the latter, in a hoarse, tremulous voice, "you have indeed done well, and deserve a glorious welcome. But I alone am left to bless you in the hour of victory, and to discharge the duties of a parent; and I alone have come forth from that unhappy city to meet you and condole with you, for no one else knows of your return."

"Oh, tell me what has happened!" cried Cheng, with alarm. "Is my father dead?"

"Have you not seen your sister, Luh-hwa?" asked the old man.

"No; did she come out to meet me?"

"Tether your horse, my son," said Mr. Wong, sadly, "and sit you down with me upon this stone, and I will tell you the sad story."

Having seated themselves beneath the scanty foliage of the solitary tree, Mr. Wong informed his old pupil of all that had happened during his absence. As the terrible tale was told poor Cheng muttered a few incoherent words and then buried his face in his hands and wept in manly silence, though at intervals a great convulsive sob would punctuate the heart-wringing sentences of his companion and the few fatherly words of compassion and consolation which he now and again interposed in his narrative.

When the poor outcast's first paroxysm of grief was over, Mr. Wong handed him his father's last letter, with which, as the reader will remember, the deceased gentleman had enclosed his signet-ring. Cheng rose to receive this sacred missive, and then, reseating himself, perused it in silence, his face growing strangely pale and stern as he approached the end.

Suddenly starting to his feet and taking a few excited strides up and down, he paused before Mr. Wong, at the same time holding up with both hands the keepsake sent to him by his beloved parent.

"I will never wear this dear ring of my father's until I have slain the murderer of my people," he said slowly and resolutely, his voice quivering

and his breast heaving with a tempest of conflicting passions.

"I swear I will dedicate my life to vengeance!" he continued, raising one arm heavenward. Then, dropping the limb grimly and listlessly to his side, he added in a deep, fervid voice: "I will do my duty!—aye, I will do it, or perish in the attempt; for, as the Master rightly says: 'live not under the same heaven as that beneath which the slayer of your father lives'."

This stupendous blow, which in a moment and when least expected shattered all his hopes and aspirations, seemed to have simultaneously changed him into a stern, resolute man with a great and solemn purpose.

"What have they done with my father's body?" he asked with grave composure.

"Your worthy uncle Lin somehow managed to obtain the body, probably by heavily bribing the gaolers, and he conveyed it with him and his family to a place called Wootang, a little village hidden among the lofty Meling mountains, where they are living with others of your clan; and, pending your arrival there, the body awaits proper interment."

"Then let us not tarry here, my dear Mr. Wong," said Cheng, approaching his pony, "as I must make preparations for an immediate departure north."

"You must be most cautious and vigilant, my good Ah-tin," said his companion, "for the Taotai has offered a reward for your capture. I have brought with me this round cap, which you must put on, it being less conspicuous than the one you are wearing; and, if you will quietly slip over the eastern wall, I will ride in on your pony through

the western gate, and we will meet at my house where Ah Sam is awaiting you."

"You have acted wisely and well, sir," said Cheng, "and I feel deeply grateful to you. We will now separate for the present."

Taking from his valise a far older jacket than the one he was wearing, and donning the skull-cap, he disguised himself as much as possible, and then assisted his venerable tutor into the saddle.

The old man at once rode away to the northwest, and Cheng sauntered towards the eastern wall, over which he had often climbed in bygone days, when, after visiting friends, he returned late to the city and wished to evade the gate-keeper's exorbitant "squeeze."

He had no difficulty in mounting to the top which at that point was quite deserted. He at once descended by a narrow path into a side-street which he quickly traversed, apparently without attracting any notice, and soon gained Mr. Wong's house. The front door was standing open and, on entering, he was met in the hall by Ah Sam, who seemed much distressed.

"Oh, sir," he said excitedly, "I suppose you have heard all about the poor master and mistress. I rode right up to the old house, and was entering by the front door, when a rascally Tartar soldier asked my business. I told him that my business was with the master of the house, Mr. Hung Fong. Whereupon the fellow jeeringly said that the house no longer belonged to the traitorous Hung family, but to the Taotai, who used it as a harem; and, as he mentioned my poor master's name, he spat upon the ground."

"Ah Sam," said Cheng, looking his trusty

servitor in the face and speaking kindly though with stern significance, "do not in my presence again allude to the terrible calamity which has befallen my honourable family, until it has been avenged ! Has Mr. Wong returned ?"

"No, sir."

"Is your revolver charged ?"

"Yes, sir, all the chambers."

"Then keep them so," said Cheng ; and he was passing inward when a thought seemed to strike him, and he paused and added : "Ah Sam, I am now an outlaw and an outcast, and in future my life will probably be one of constant peril and hardship. Do you still desire to remain with me ?"

"Yes, sir, and to the end of my life. I will never leave you."

"My future acts shall reveal to you my appreciation of your devotion," said Cheng in an earnest voice.

Then ascending a flight of stairs he entered the small reception room. To his surprise the place was bare, save for a small table and a couple of chairs, and upon the floor were two travelling valises packed as if in readiness for a journey. While he was wondering at these preparations he heard Mr. Wong's voice in the passage and at once called to him.

"My dear Mr. Wong," he said, as the old gentleman ascended the stairs, "are you about to leave this house ?"

"Yes, my son," he replied. "I have sold my furniture, and for some time have been preparing to quit this luckless city and journey with you. For I promised your most noble father, just before

we parted for the last time, to act as a parent in his stead."

"Bless your great gallant heart! You have indeed been true to me and mine!" said Cheng; "but I am now a homeless outcast, and my wanderings will be far and long, since I go to seek ways and means of avenging those loved ones who have perished, and of freeing my country from its dastardly oppressors."

"I shall not seek to dissuade you from your just resolve, which is in accordance with the decrees of Heaven," replied the old man.

"Let your ways be my ways, and your cause my cause, for, although I am growing hoary with age, and most of my kindred have passed away, my arm is still strong. Moreover, Ah-tin, I have no son, and my love for you approacheth very nigh unto the love of a father; and the little money I have saved during many years of diligent learning and tutorship will be of service to you."

"Heaven must truly bless my people and my purpose to have so turned your heart to me," said Cheng earnestly and gratefully. "We will go forth into the world together, and I will be as a son to you. But look; what is this?"

Someone had thrown through the open window a small bamboo tube which fell almost at Cheng's feet. Picking it up, he found that in the hollow of the bamboo a letter had been skilfully concealed. This he extracted and read aloud:—

TO MR. HUNG FONG CHENG.

Your life is in great and immediate danger, and I entreat you to flee from this city at once; for the magistrate has been acquainted of your arrival and has already given orders for your arrest. I am powerless to help you and can only ask you

to believe in my sincerity, and to feel that my heart is full of sorrow and sympathy for you and yours.

SHUN AH LEEN.

"It is evident that spies have dogged our steps," said Mr. Wong in alarm and consternation.

"What had we better do?" asked Cheng. "Are the horses safe?"

"Yes, they are stabled close by with a sturdy mare of mine which I have lately bought," replied Mr. Wong. "So we had better quit this house at once and send Ah Sam out of the city with the horses and our luggage. He can await us on Palm Tree Hill, where there is good cover.

"But we must seek refuge elsewhere, for the present," he added; "and at night fall we can get over the wall and, rejoining Ah Sam, make good our escape."

Cheng now called Ah Sam, to whom he handed Mr. Wong's luggage, at the same time telling him to take the three horses to Palm Tree Hill, situated to the northward of the city, where he was to wait for them until the next morning. If they had not then arrived there, he was to return to Lien and endeavour to learn their fate and, if possible, render them assistance.

Within three-quarters of an hour our two friends had left the house and were making their way towards the city temple, where they intended to seek refuge until night; while Ah Sam had succeeded in gaining the open country, having deceived the keeper at the north gate into the belief that he was an itinerant trader.

It was fortunate for them that they had acted with such promptness, for no sooner had they got

well clear of Mr. Wong's humble residence than a party of Tartar soldiers suddenly entered and searched it from top to bottom, though only to find the place empty and vacated.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon when they arrived at one of the side entrances of the temple. Cheng at once made his way to the private chamber of the chief priest, Lo Feng Liu, and asked for food and sanctuary for Mr. Wong and himself. The good man welcomed him in a fatherly, sympathetic manner.

"I am deeply grieved for you and your most honourable family," he said, leading the way into one of the apartments at the rear of the building, to which Mr. Wong was also conducted.

"Perhaps you have already heard," he added, still addressing Cheng, "that your most worthy mother confided to my care the tablets of your illustrious forefathers, which I have placed in a safe and secluded corner of the temple, where incense has been kept burning before them."

"I am indeed most grateful to you," said Cheng, "and I shall deem it a great favour if you will now show me their whereabouts, that I may do service to them."

Leaving Mr. Wong in conversation with another priest, Lo Feng Liu conducted Cheng to the western corner of the inner sanctuary where, amidst deep and solemn gloom, the Hung tablets were standing upon an altar, around which several idols of great antiquity and celebrity were just visible. The atmosphere was heavy with perfume, and blue clouds of smoke circled above the heads of the grim and solitary deities.

"I will now leave you," whispered the priest,

respectfully inclining his head towards the tablets, and then silently gliding out of the sacred chamber.

After prostrating himself several times before these family heirlooms, Cheng knelt and prayed for the souls of the departed ones, and that he and his sister might some day be reunited. Then lighting a couple of candles and placing them in front of the tablets, he took from his pocket the ring his father had sent him, and, laying it upon the altar, took the oath of vengeance.

Just as he emerged into the central hall, the chief priest rushed towards him.

"Quick, follow me!" he cried, leading the way across the large and gloomy interior; "a party of soldiers is approaching."

Cheng was not slow in following the good priest who conducted him to a narrow arched passage made of solid stone, which led into a small courtyard. Here they found Mr. Wong and the other priest anxiously awaiting them. The latter was carrying a lighted lantern.

Lo Feng Liu now stooped down and, sliding a large stone into a hollow groove in the wall, revealed to their astonished gaze a dark aperture and a moss-grown flight of steps, down which the two fugitives were escorted by the under-priest.

As they descended into the darkness, the stone trap closed over them, and by the dim light of the lantern they saw that they were in a long and narrow tunnel.

"This subterranean passage," said the guide, "was used by the priests in the turbulent days of old, and it leads to a small ruined temple on the north-eastern wall of the city."

"Then, with your kind permission," said Mr.

Wong, "we will use this passage to-night as a means of escape."

"Certainly you can, and, in the meantime, you are perfectly safe here," replied the good man; "and when the soldiers have gone we will rejoin my colleague and have some refreshment."

Once or twice they heard the tramp of feet overhead, and Cheng's hand involuntarily sought his revolver. But no one noticed the hidden trap door, and the chief priest was too loyal a man to betray old and respected clansmen and citizens.

They had been underground for nearly an hour when the stone trap was suddenly drawn back, and Lo Feng Liu inserted his head in the aperture.

"Remain where you are," he whispered, handing down a pot of hot tea and some rice-balls. "They have searched everywhere, but some spy must have seen you enter, for all exits are being guarded by Tartar soldiers."

At length, after what seemed an eternity of time, the chief priest handed down a newly-trimmed lantern and said that it was now dark, but that the soldiers were still guarding the outer doors of the temple. Before he again closed the trap-door the two fugitives thanked him for his great kindness and informed him of their intention to make use of the subterranean passage to escape.

"May good fortune attend you," he said, silently closing the trap as he added, "the passage has not been traversed for many years, and you may have some difficulty in raising the stone at the other end."

They now commenced their walk through the tunnel, the priest going ahead of them with the lantern. Arriving at the further end without

mishap, they ascended a flight of narrow, slippery steps, and came to a square slab of stone which they had considerable difficulty in moving, as it had become firmly embedded in its socket. However, it eventually yielded under the combined efforts of Cheng and the priest, and they emerged into a large apartment, the roof of which was supported by finely-sculptured columns, though the place was in a state of sad dilapidation, and huge pieces of masonry were strewn upon the stone flooring.

In each corner stood a crumbling image, and bats fluttered in silent flight in and out of the open doors and crannies through which the night wind wailed weirdly.

Leading out of the main chamber were a couple of smaller ones in which the priests of the temple had originally lodged; and into one of these rooms Cheng asked Mr. Wong to wait while he went down into the city for the purpose of trying to recover the casket of rare treasures which his father had secreted in the rockwork of their garden.

The old gentleman earnestly endeavoured to dissuade him from this rash and hazardous undertaking, but our young friend was determined not to leave those valuables behind if they still remained undiscovered.

The priest kindly offered to stay with Mr. Wong until Cheng returned; so the latter at once left the ruin and made his way along the top of the wall until coming to a steep and narrow path which he cautiously descended, for he knew that parties of soldiers were likely to be still scouring the city for him.

Scrupulously avoiding the broad thoroughfares,

he kept to the narrow unfrequented ones, though not even then without considerable risk, for more than once he heard the sound of armed men in close proximity to him, and on one occasion was obliged to crouch down in a doorway while a party of soldiers and yamen-runners passed on the opposite side of the way. However, he knew that the sympathy of the people was with him, and that anyone would have afforded him shelter, and the knowledge of this made him feel reliant and hopeful of being able to accomplish his object.

After dodging about for nearly an hour he arrived at the eastern side of his old home, and, passing along close to the wall, stopped at a place which he knew must face the rockwork in which the precious casket had been hidden.

Looking cautiously around to see that his movements were not being watched, he prepared to climb over the wall, which was rather a high one. Not being able to find a crevice where the toe could be placed, he tucked up his lower garment and stepping back a few paces, made a rush and a spring and somehow managed to clamber to the top.

Noiselessly descending to the ground by means of some vine-branches, he began to make his way to the spot where the casket had been secreted; but he had not proceeded far when the sound of voices, issuing from an arbour which he would have to pass, caused him to pause and listen. Evidently a man and woman were conversing together.

Creeping forward to a clump of bushes which hid him from the view of those in the arbour, he quietly held the foliage aside and peered through;

and as he did so his breast gave a mighty heave and his hand involuntarily clutched the loaded revolver he was carrying. For there before him sat the Taotai of Lien, also a beautiful woman, who was probably his favourite concubine.

"The murderer of my poor father!" he breathed to himself, his eyes being rivetted upon that ruthless tyrant, who was dressed in the most costly robes, while jewels glittered from his girdle.

For a moment Cheng had some difficulty in restraining himself from rushing forward and slaying him, and his finger trembled upon the trigger of his revolver; but then an inward voice seemed to counsel him to be patient, and to await the great time when all men should bear witness to the vindication of his name and rights, and to his retributive blow.

So he bent down and moved on alertly to the rockwork, over which he ran his fingers for some time before being able to feel the loose brick. At last he found the right one, and with trembling hand withdrew it. To his satisfaction he found the casket, which he at once drew forth and secreted beneath his jacket.

He had just replaced the brick and was retracing his steps when, on arriving at the corner of the rockwork, past which wound a pathway lighted by bright-coloured paper lanterns, he suddenly came face to face with a lady who happened to be passing that way, followed by two amahs bearing lanterns. It was Ah Leen.

They both seemed to instantaneously recognise one another; and, with great presence of mind, the young girl prevented her attendants from also seeing the intruder by waving them back and

saying that she wished to speak privately with someone. Fortunately Cheng was hidden from the view of these women by a jutting angle of the rockwork, so they probably thought that their young mistress had met her father.

"I pray you not to betray me," said Cheng, bowing and speaking guardedly, "and I feel deeply grateful to you for having given me warning of my danger."

"Have you come here to injure my father?" she asked, colouring deeply and speaking in a sad, subdued voice.

"No, Miss Shun," he answered with calm dignity; "I came to recover a small though valuable article which my unfortunate father hid for me in this rockwork, which originally belonged to my family."

"I am deeply sorry for you," said Lee-fah tremulously, "and I pleaded, though in vain, for your father's life."

"I thank you, Miss Shun," he said with a cold and courtly inclination of the head. "Ours is indeed a sad fate, for we are separated by a crime which must be expiated. Of course you are not to blame."

"Allow me to apologise for this intrusion, and to depart from these grounds," he added, bowing and moving away as quickly as possible, leaving her standing there like one dazed or in a dream.

He managed to re-pass the spot where the Taotai was sitting without being heard, and had no difficulty in climbing over the wall, as the inner side of it was covered with thick-stemmed vines and peach trees. Then hurrying away down a narrow lane, he soon managed to rejoin Mr. Wong

and the priest, both of whom were beginning to feel anxious for his safety. The latter now bade them good bye, and, not having any reason to again traverse that narrow underground passage, descended into the city.

"Now let us hasten away," said Mr. Wong, "for the night is dark and time is precious."

Taking one another by the hand they groped their way along the parapet of the wall. They were obliged to be most cautious and to pause at intervals to hear whether any sound broke the stillness, for they knew that a couple of sentries always kept watch on the walls by night. However, they managed, without mishap, to gain the place where the descent was to be made. Mr. Wong had thoughtfully brought with him a very thin but immensely strong grass rope, which he had carried round his waist, and which would be useful as a life-line. Tying one end of the line round his waist and giving the coil to Cheng, he got over the parapet, and, with much pluck and agility for one so aged, soon climbed down to the ground.

"Look out," murmured Cheng, "I will throw the rope down as I do not require it."

As he said this a gruff challenge came out of the darkness on his right, and he saw the indistinct form of a sentry approaching him.

Throwing down the rope and hastily scrambling over the parapet, he made speedy use of every jutting brick and branch to descend, and he had just reached *terra-firma*, and was warning Mr. Wong of the danger, when a shot rang out, and, with a loud thud, a bullet struck the ground just beside the old man.

"We must run for our lives!" he said in a hoarse whisper.

As Cheng grasped his companion's hand and assisted him to travel with unwonted swiftness, another bullet hissed over their heads, and they heard the sentry's shouts as he rushed down into the city to raise the alarm; for he had evidently been told to keep a vigilant watch at that particular part of the wall.

"Are we likely to be chased by cavalry?" asked Cheng as they dashed forward towards Palm Tree Hill.

"Yes," gasped poor Mr. Wong, "there is half a squadron in the city!"

Cheng asked no more questions but redoubled his efforts to escape, though now and again he murmured apologies for causing his companion so much inconvenience. But the staunch and hardy old man only puffed and laboured, and briefly told him to go ahead for all he was worth; and ahead they went.

Suddenly they heard the clatter of horses' hoofs in front of them, so, thinking that perhaps a troop of cavalry had been despatched from the north gate to intercept them, they stopped and threw themselves flat upon the ground.

Nearer and nearer came the horses, and our two friends were in such imminent danger of being trampled underfoot, that Cheng drew his revolver and standing up prepared to sell his life dearly. But, just as he was levelling his weapon at the dark mass ahead, he heard from that direction the voice of Ah Sam urging his animals forward; so, lowering his revolver, he cried out to him.

"I am here, master!" answered the faithful fellow, riding up to them and drawing rein.

"I heard shots fired," he added, "and, thinking you might be in trouble, hurried along with the horses."

"You have done well," said Cheng, taking the reins of one animal and quickly assisting Mr. Wong into the saddle.

"We had better ride due east for some distance," said the latter, as Cheng mounted his pony, and the little party galloped away.

They must have ridden about three miles when Ah Sam, who was a little behind the others, shouted out that he fancied he saw lights and heard the sound of pursuing horsemen.

"To the left!" cried Mr. Wong, turning his horse's head and with his companions riding for dear life to the northward; for a troop of cavalry had evidently been split up into small parties and distributed over a wide area of country on the chance of capturing them.

Onward dashed the fugitives, now and again looking anxiously back, and straining eyes and ears to discover whether there were any further signs of their pursuers; but throughout the rest of the night they safely and swiftly sped on to the northeast, and, in spite of uneven ground or other impediments, they covered nearly sixty miles before morning dawned.

They now found themselves in wild mountainous country, with here and there a few scattered homesteads; but they did not draw rein until about ten o'clock when they came to a grassy plateau which commanded an extensive and magnificent view on all sides. By this time the horses were quite

exhausted, so they were hobbled and turned adrift to graze, while the travellers sat down and hungrily demolished a few rice-cakes and some *samshu* which Ah Sam had thoughtfully brought with him.

At noon they resumed their journey, following a narrow, devious path which led among rugged and desolate highlands.

Day was beginning to wane when, on gaining a lofty eminence, they saw before them an ancient and solitary temple hewn out of the solid rock. So urging their jaded animals into a trot they soon approached a small flight of steps which led to a richly-sculptured gateway, at which stood a priest who beckoned them forward.

Dismounting they led their ponies up the broad steps, at the top of which they were met by the shaven-headed Bonze who was clad in a rough grey-coloured garment. *

"Welcome, my brothers, for you look weary with long travel," he said, courteously acknowledging their salutations. "We have plain, though wholesome food for you, and good provender for your animals."

He now conducted them across a small courtyard and, opening a ponderous door, led the way into a spacious cavern at the further end of which the horses were soon comfortably stalled. Then they ascended a narrow flight of steps and, traversing a long gallery, passed through a pear-shaped opening which led out upon a balcony hewn out of the mountain-side, and protected by a curiously

* The Buddhist priests dress in the manner of the Chinese prior to the Manchu-Tartar dynasty, wearing no queue. On especial occasions they wear a long white robe, and a mantle of pink and yellow.

sculptured balustrade. About two thousand feet below them was a deep gorge, between the steep sides of which ran a broad stream that zig-zagged away to the north, shining in the twilight like a silver ribbon—now dodging behind a woody eminence, now tilting over a rocky precipice, and now meandering through a deep valley, until lost in a wilderness of shadowy heights which belted the horizon on all sides, except to the westward, where the sun was setting behind a vast forest.

After gradually ascending the mountain for some distance they came to an oval aperture, through which their guide led them into a cavern of considerable dimensions, where they were cordially welcomed by several other priests who were seated at a round table partaking of their evening meal.

Our friends were treated with great hospitality by these cave-dwelling Bonzes, most of whom had spent the better part of their lives in that world-forgotten place. And, when supper was over, they gathered around Cheng and listened with rapt attention to his description of Canton and other places he had visited; while Mr. Wong also delighted them with his lore and philosophy, and with his wide and varied experiences.

Next morning at an early hour the priests and their guests assembled and shared the first meal, after which our friends took leave of them, Cheng giving the chief priest a small jewel of considerable value, which was much prized by the good man.

One of the priests accompanied the travellers for a couple of miles, and then, having put them on the right path for the hamlet of Wootang, which lay some twenty miles to the north-east, took leave of them.

Throughout the day they rode on, traversing wild and mountainous country, only stopping at intervals to rest the horses and take a drink of water at some clear stream. But towards evening the path gradually sloped downward into a fertile valley, graced by a few rustic homesteads which nestled among clumps of bamboos and shady banyan trees.

As they approached the little settlement some of the inhabitants came forth to meet them; and they soon learned that they had arrived at their destination.

A young boy informed them that Mr. Hung Ling and his family were residing there, and he showed them to a pretty cottage, at the door of which Cheng was met by his uncle and cousins, who gave him and Mr. Wong a warm and sympathetic welcome, and congratulated the former on his narrow escape from the Taotai of Lien. They were eager to learn the latest news concerning that sorrow-stricken city, and until a late hour of the night sat together talking of the terrible calamity which had befallen their family.

Next day Cheng performed the last sacred duties to the mortal remains of his beloved father. A geomancer had already found a favourable site for the grave, and, at an early hour in the morning, Cheng and his uncle and cousins, also his venerable tutor, attired themselves in white sackcloth and attended by a band of hired mourners and musicians—the former crying out lamentations and the latter playing mournful dirges—followed the coffin to a neighbouring hillside which faced the east. The deceased man's worthy brother had already gone to considerable expense to prepare

for him a fitting sepulchre, which was omega-shaped, the vault being approached by a flight of stone steps and guarded by a slab of marble.

A couple of priests officiated at the funeral, and after Cheng had burned paper models representing everything likely to be required by his parent in the spirit world, the coffin was placed with much ceremony in the tomb which was afterwards closed. Then the mourners, with the exception of the chief one, formed in procession and returned homeward. But Cheng remained behind to pray and do penance before the grave; and for three days and nights he stayed there alone on the hillside, as is the custom among the dutiful Sons of Han. And on the evening of the fourth day he slowly returned to his uncle's house, and his face was grave and careworn; and his kindred noticed that sorrow had prematurely aged the once bright and ambitious youth, changing him into a man with a grim, unspoken purpose, which seemed to estrange him from the ordinary pleasures and pursuits of the world.

One bright morning, before the mists had cleared from the vast and gloomy mountains which surrounded the vale of Wootang, Cheng and his aged friend and the faithful Ah Sam bade a long good-bye to Mr. Hung Ling and his family, and rode away to the westward.

At sundown they stopped among a tribe of hardy hill-people; and when they had partaken of their rude though liberal hospitality, Cheng gathered the men around him and spoke to them of many things which touched their hearts. And the stalwart highlanders bowed their heads and listened intently, and now and again deep-throated

murmurs of approval came from them, as the speaker brought home to them with telling force the tyranny and injustice of those despots who degraded the sacred throne of the Mings, and dragged the people of China down to the very dust, leaving them to die in want and penury.

Cheng could speak to them in their mother-tongue, and, besides being far beyond his years in wisdom and learning, was deeply indoctrinated in the lore of the land. Moreover, his attractive personality, and his stern impassioned eloquence, appealed to their hearts, and they smote their breasts and swore that they were free-born men and would follow him anywhere, and fight for freedom as their honoured fathers had fought for it in days gone by.

That night Cheng and his companions ate coarse though wholesome food, and slept in a cave; and at sunrise they mounted their ponies and rode onward to the west. And those rough hill-men stood looking after them, talking to one another of what had been said to them; and just as the three travellers were passing from their view over the brow of a hill, Cheng looked back and waved his hand, and gruff, far-reaching voices shouted farewell words of goodwill to him and his companions. Afterwards when people from distant villages in the west passed that way, they would sometimes bring to the elder of the clan a letter from the young wanderer; and the sturdy highlanders would gather round to hear the message read and to discuss it. But as time wore on, those letters became more rare, and, when one arrived, it would be soiled and creased with long journeying, and they would know that it had been brought from afar, and would prize it all the more.



CHAPTER XXI

THE PARAGRAPH AND THE MEETING

It was a fine evening in the spring of the year 19—. Montrose was seated in the reading room of the new Hongkong Club, having recently returned to the Colony after a lengthy stay in the interior of Eastern Kwang-tung. Over six years had elapsed since he had parted from Cheng, and not once during that period had he heard any tidings of him or of poor Luh-hwa, though he had often wondered what had become of them; particularly of the latter, whom he had frequently endeavoured to find, yet without obtaining the least clue as to her whereabouts. But she was not forgotten by him.

One day, about two years after Luh-hwa's strange disappearance from Mrs. Brancome's house, that lady happened to meet Montrose in Hongkong, and, hearing him express deep regret in not having been able to find his missing *protégé*, became somewhat irritated and, in a thoughtless moment, repeated to him the fatal words she had addressed to the gentle creature she had promised to befriend and had sheltered beneath her roof. In a second Montrose realised the whole truth and, in a short,

cutting sentence, expressed regret that he had ever intruded upon her kindness and hospitality; and without another word he quitted her presence, and since then the friendship has not been renewed.

He had been thinking of past days and of those lost friends and, in order to divert his mind from sad thoughts, had taken up the evening paper, when his attention was suddenly arrested by the following paragraph:—

We hear on reliable authority that the Viceroy of Canton is despatching a large number of well-equipped troops to subdue and, if possible, capture a notorious rebel leader, named Hung Fong Cheng, who for some time past has been giving the Chinese authorities much trouble. It is reported that his stronghold is in the Nanling mountains, situated on the borders of Kwang-si and Hunan, and that he is about to invade the important city of Quei-ling-fu. Hitherto his various operations seem to have been attended with considerable success, and he is fast gathering around him a formidable army, chiefly drawn from the hardy and warlike tribes inhabiting the mountainous regions of Kwang-si and Kwang-tung, who have always energetically resisted the present government. The expedition has been devised and will be carried out with the utmost secrecy and promptitude. It will probably leave Canton to-morrow, accompanied by two brigades of French infantry, one of cavalry, and two mountain batteries, and will endeavour by forced marches to utterly rout the insurgent forces before they are further reinforced and are able to strike a decisive blow by capturing Quei-ling-fu. If the revolt, which is said to be essentially anti-dynastic, can be quelled before it assumes serious proportions, it may deter the energetic leaders of the Reform Party from again assisting to raise the standard of rebellion, and may thus avert a general rising among the people of Southern China.

“Brave fellow!” exclaimed Montrose, rising and excitedly pacing the room.

During the last few years he had seen much of the domestic life of the Chinese, and had learned to respect their manners and customs, and to

sympathise with the bold-spirited Southerners in their manful struggles to free themselves from the intolerable yoke of their pitiless rulers. He knew what a heart-felt grievance Hung Fong Cheng had against the sanguinary tyrants who had caused his beloved parents to die, and who had robbed him of his rightful heritage and made him and his kindred outcasts and wanderers.

During those few minutes while Montrose was thoughtfully pacing the room, he arrived at the supreme crisis of his life and entered upon a new phase of existence ; for, be it said to his credit, he now made a resolve to go to the assistance of his old friend, who was in danger of defeat and destruction.

Montrose had learned that, like the Israelites of old, the Chinese pined for freedom and good government, and were a people who had been cruelly maligned and misrepresented by those who had not sufficiently studied their character and institutions. He knew that they revered all that was good, refined and intellectual; and the poorest coolie and even a thief would not desecrate or steal from a temple, or even wittingly trample underfoot a piece of paper which had been written or printed upon.* Moreover, he knew that for such a thrifty, virtuous and ingenious race there was a prosperous future looming in the near distance, if they could regain their independence ; and

* If a Chinaman sees a piece of written or printed paper lying upon the ground he will pick it up and deposit it in one of the proper receptacles provided for such matter, these generally being wooden boxes which are placed in all the thoroughfares throughout China, and are cleared at stated periods, when the contents are sealed up in large urns and buried in the ground or in deep water, the ceremony being in some districts performed by priests and musicians.

he felt that, by helping them to achieve this, he would be rendering them a greater and more humane service than by only preaching and propounding a doctrine which they were not yet fitted to receive. They must be freed from the intolerable yoke of their task-masters before they could become a Christian people. He had learned this from hard-earned experience.

Being a man of inflexible purpose he did not waver after once coming to a decision; and, in this instance, he determined to start almost immediately for the distant Nanling mountains, as he had a long journey before him and meant to give Cheng timely warning of the danger with which he was threatened.

Having again read the paragraph in question, and made a few notes in his pocket-book, he left the club and proceeded toward his residence, which was situated at the top of Pedder's Hill.

It was a clear moonlight night and, while he strolled slowly and thoughtfully along, his mind was occupied with serious thoughts.

Just as he was turning out of Pedder's Street into the Queen's Road, he happened to collide with another gentleman, who seemed equally lost in meditation; and as the latter looked up, Montrose seemed to recognise in him an old acquaintance.

"Pardon me," he said, "but have I the pleasure of again meeting Doctor Sen?"

"Really, sir, I am at a loss to recall your features," replied the stranger, with a bland smile and speaking guardedly.

"My name is Montrose, and, if I am not mistaken, I met you some years ago at a house in

Shin Hing Lane, on the occasion of Mr. Tai's escape from Canton with his son."

"Pray pardon my forgetfulness," said the gentleman, who was small of stature and bespectacled. "Yes, I remember you now, and am pleased to have met you once more.

"But I am obliged to be careful," he added, "as my steps are dogged by detectives employed by the Chinese authorities; and my term of banishment from this Colony has not yet expired. Will you accompany me to my rooms? I should much like to have a conversation with you."

Montrose readily accepted the invitation and, as they walked on together, he told Dr. Sen of the paragraph he had just seen in the evening paper, and casually expressed a desire to render Cheng assistance.

"Yes, and I have also read it," said the doctor, "and I shall take immediate steps to support him by leading a mobile force to keep in touch with the Imperial troops, and be ready to deliver a flank attack when they are moving to the assault of the Nanling insurgents. I must send a trusty messenger to acquaint Hung Fong Cheng of my intentions, that he may make his plans accordingly."

"If you will entrust me with the message," said Montrose, "I will endeavour to promptly deliver it, as I am resolved to personally warn my friend of his danger."

"It is very good of you," said Dr. Sen, "for, unless he is well prepared for any emergency, he might be suddenly attacked and defeated, particularly as French troops are about to move against him. I should have thought that by this time, and considering the terrible events

of recent occurrence in Peking and elsewhere, the European Powers would have learned how utterly futile it is for them to support the corrupt and dishonourable government of China, which merely feeds them upon lying edicts and worthless promises!"

They now entered a Chinese house in Sing Wong Street, and the doctor showed his companion into a small though luxuriously furnished apartment that was well stocked with English books, most of which related to military subjects.

Taking a large map of China down from a shelf and placing it upon the table he pointed out the nearest route to the Nanling mountains.

"But how," asked Montrose, "will you be able, in the short time at your disposal, to collect sufficient men to take the field and keep in touch with the Imperialist forces?"

Dr. Sen ran his finger in a west-north-westerly direction over the Kwang-tung and Kwang-si provinces, which were covered with blue and red marks, against each of which was a numeral.

"These marks and figures," said Dr. Sen, "represent certain districts and the number of men that can be drawn from each of them. I shall start from Shan-shau, which is to the west of Canton, with perhaps one hundred men, and shall at first keep to the river, avoiding the large cities, though passing through Tien-chuen, Ping-nan, and Wu-suen, recruiting as I go along, and keeping clear of the enemy, of whose movements I shall be constantly informed by experienced scouts.

"Until a certain point is reached," he continued, "my army will be composed of independent units, each man travelling alone and following his own

route, as this will avoid hostile encounters and the consequent delays. From Wu-suen I shall strike to the north and at Ping-lo be strongly reinforced, as that city is full of Triad men and others, who are loyal to the dethroned Mings. A great rising has been planned for the fifteenth of next month, but by despatching express messengers to the various chiefs and head-men, their followers will be prepared to join the army at the appointed place.

"Before six o'clock to-morrow morning," he added, "I hope, with the assistance of some friends, to have made the necessary arrangements; and if you will call here between ten and eleven in the forenoon I will give you the despatch for Hung Fong Cheng."

After some further conversation Montrose took leave of the indefatigable reform leader and made his way to his own house.

As he could do nothing more that night beyond maturing his plans, he went to the sitting-room and, opening the window, which overlooked the harbour, sat down and was soon immersed in thought. The atmosphere was so clear and the moon so bright that the shipping was plainly visible, also the neighbouring mainland with its effective background of hills, to which the light and distance imparted a pale purple hue.

He must have been sitting there about an hour when he was awakened from his deliberations by the sound of a guitar proceeding from a small courtyard beneath his window; and as a sweet though faint voice accompanied the music, he knew that the serenader was one of the poor "sing-song" girls, who are generally blind or attended by a woman thus afflicted. Indeed,

Hongkong by night would not be complete without these wandering minstrels, who gain a meagre though honest livelihood by playing in the streets or at banquets.

After listening intently to the song, which was a plaintive one and touchingly rendered, he took from his pocket a dollar piece, and, leaning out of the window, threw it down, at the same time uttering a few polite words of thanks and commendation.

He could see at a glance that one of them was a girl, and the other a middle-aged woman, and blind, for, as she instinctively raised her face, the white of her eyes gleamed in the moonlight. The former stooped down and, picking up the coin, made a deep obeisance and looked up to Montrose; and, as she did so, her eyes met his, and both of them gave a start of surprise, she being visibly agitated. Then, with a little shame-faced bow, she nervously took her companion's hand and hurriedly led her away.

But in a moment Montrose dashed out of the room and downstairs, and, just as they had crossed the courtyard and were passing out of the gate, he caught them up.

"Is it you, Luh-hwa?" he asked excitedly, taking the girl's hand and detaining her.

And as she turned her face to his and in a tremulous voice answered to her name, he saw that, though even more beautiful than before, she was very pale and thin.

"Oh, Luh-hwa," he said with deep emotion, "I have found you at last! And are you the same dear friend I knew in former years?"

"I am poor, yet I have not changed," she answered, tears falling from her eyes as she

added: "And this is my stepmother, who has lost her sight. Being unable to maintain her and myself by working embroidery, I have of late years made sufficient money, by playing and singing, to provide us with the common necessities of life."

"Come with me, both of you," he said gently, taking her hand, "for we must never part again. I have long looked for you, but in vain; and, strange to say, only this very night I have heard of your dear brother. I suppose you have not received any tidings of him?"

"No, not for many years," she replied sadly, "though I have often wondered what has become of him. Is he well? And do you know where he is?"

"I am soon going to him," said Montrose, "for he is a long distance away, and, being now in arms against the present government, is in some danger of being attacked by a large force."

"But come," he added, as they entered the house, "you and your stepmother must take some refreshment, and then I will explain all."

Of late years Ah-choi had much aged, and most of her beauty was gone; but through the gentle influence of her stepdaughter, upon whom she had become utterly dependent, she had given up her former vices and had borne her affliction with womanly patience. The poor creature seemed thankful to have thus suddenly found a comfortable home, for she had learned from long experience what it is to be buffeted about by the world, and the meal to which they now sat down seemed to do her much good. Then, seeing that she was weary with walking, Montrose thoughtfully had her shown to a commodious room which she

was to share with Luh-hwa. The latter at once assisted her stepmother upstairs, but, at the request of Montrose, she afterwards rejoined him, and he led her out into the garden which was of considerable size and filled with tropical plants.

"This seems quite like old times," he said, attentively scanning the moonlit face of his companion.

"Luh-hwa," he added gently, "had you forgotten me?"

"No; for see," she replied, lifting her hand, "I have never removed your ring from this finger though sometimes we have been without food."

"But why did you leave me? Was it because you thought that I cared for some other woman?"

She lowered her head and looked down, and a crimson flush mantled her pale face, that more eloquently answered his interrogation than any words could have done.

"Luh-hwa," he continued softly, his voice full of deep feeling, "we have been parted for years, but never once have I ceased from loving you, nor from cherishing a hope that some day we might meet again. My hopes and prayers have at length been mercifully answered, and, knowing how pure and noble you are, I will now speak the words which have been left so long unspoken, by saying that I should like you to be my lifelong companion—to be my wife!"

She did not answer him, but, although the tears were falling from her eyes, there came into her face a look of such sublime, heart-felt rapture, that he stooped down and, murmuring a fervent blessing, gently caressed her brow.

"I feel too happy: it all seems like a dream,"

she at length said, with childlike simplicity, as they walked hand-in-hand through the quiet garden.

Then he explained to her how her brother was situated, and she begged that he would allow her to accompany him on his journey to the Nanling mountains. But this was a matter for grave consideration, so he promised to let her know his decision on the morrow. After a time they returned indoors, and he bade her good-night.

Next morning when Montrose came down to breakfast he found Luh-hwa leading Ah-choi about the garden, and both of them would now and again stoop down to smell the flowers. The elder woman was weak and attenuated; nevertheless she appeared happy and contented, while the younger one looked fresh and beautiful, for the very knowledge that she was really loved by Montrose, and would have to roam no more, seemed to have given new zest to the young life which had known such troubles and vicissitudes. Their professional robes had been discarded for plain blue silken ones which were very becoming, as one of the servants had already fetched their few wordly belongings from the room in which they had lodged.

Directly Luh-hwa observed Montrose she came forward and, with a winsome smile and graceful bow, placed her hand in his and drew him to where Ah-choi was standing.

"My stepmother wishes to again thank you for your great kindness," she said; and then the blind woman made a respectful obeisance and gave utterance to her gratefulness.

"Our home will be your home," he said kindly, shaking Ah-choi's hand, "and I wish you to be

happy and comfortable; for, of late years, you must both have suffered severe trials and hardships."

"We were just saying," said the woman with a pensive smile, "the scent of the flowers in this garden remind us of our old home which was large and beautiful."

He at once gathered some flowers and gave each of them a small bunch, and this trivial though refined act of attention and gallantry seemed to give them much pleasure; and the manner in which the flowers were received by them plainly bespoke their delicacy of feeling and unaffected gentility.

Montrose felt like a new man, and his step was light and his face bright and gladsome, as he made his way down to Sing Wong Street to see Dr. Sen, whom he found seated in his study.

"Everything is in working order," said the energetic reform leader, "and here, sir, is the letter for our noble friend, Hung."

Montrose took the missive and then asked whether it would be safe and practicable for a Chinese lady to accompany him on the journey.

Dr. Sen thought for a moment.

"Yes," he said, "providing you keep to the West River districts as far as Yang-so, and when in any difficulty, or when passing armed men, use our new countersign, which is *Sen-cheng*."

"I am leaving for the interior to-day," he added. "When do you expect to take your departure?"

"In about four days," replied Montrose, who proceeded to converse with him upon the coming struggle and other matters of import.

Immediately after this interview with Dr.

Sen, Montrose returned home and acquainted Luh-hwa of his willingness that she should accompany him on his journey. She was delighted at the prospect of going with him to find her long-lost brother, and arrangements were forthwith made for the comfort of Ah-choi during their absence, a good amah being engaged to attend upon her.

At this period the chief events connected with the lives of the few surviving characters of this story crowded so thick and fast upon one another, that it is necessary to be somewhat brief in relating some of them. So let it be sufficient for me to say that on May 14, 19—, and just three days after their strange meeting, Montrose and Luh-hwa were married by special licence at Hongkong Cathedral; and that next morning they left for Canton, preparatory to starting upon their memorable journey to the distant Nanling mountains.



CHAPTER XXII

THE FALL OF QUEI-LING

On the morning of the 23rd of May, exactly eight days after leaving Canton, Montrose and his wife came in contact with the advanced outposts of Cheng's army, a few miles to the southward of the town of Hwai-yuen.

On the second day of their journey they had passed close to the Imperialist forces; and during the rest of the way they had frequently overtaken small bands of armed men going in the same direction as themselves. But whenever Montrose uttered the password *Sen-cheng*, it seemed to have a magical effect, for every man would wave his weapon and, with a grim smile, shout *Hai-loa, ngo lae!* (Yes, we are coming) as he doggedly trudged on to the north-west.

At nine o'clock on the morning in question, on coming to the base of a low hill which stretched several miles to the left and right of them, they encountered a number of soldiers lying in a trench. An officer, wearing a richly-embroidered jacket and a red turban, at once came forward and demanded their business.

Montrose informed him that he was the bearer

of an urgent message to Hung Fong Cheng; whereupon the lieutenant, for such he proved to be, called two soldiers and ordered them to escort the travellers to headquarters.

The men were fine specimens of humanity, each being six feet high, and were polite and agreeable. They wore a very handsome uniform consisting of a short red-coloured tunic, with trousers of the same colour and material, and high thick-soled boots, their head-gear being a turban, with a silken tassel at the side, beneath which their hair was gracefully coiled.

Our friends were conducted up the side of the hill and, on arriving at the top, they looked down into a fertile valley where a grand and impressive sight met their gaze.

For about a mile on either hand stretched a vast camp—a veritable city of tents; and these were arranged in even lines between which were broad spaces, each tent being of a bright orange colour which shone like gold in the sun. In the centre of the camp was a huge marquee striped with red and surmounted by a silken standard of yellow and red emblazoned with a “double dragon”; and at the foot of the hill a large force of infantry and cavalry was performing various evolutions, while the blare of trumpets and the clank of arms gave animation to that warlike scene.

“Your brother is indeed no ordinary man!” exclaimed Montrose, who was leading his wife’s horse, his martial ardour rising within him as with a thrill of wonder and admiration his eye fell upon this grand array.

“He has a true and brave heart,” she replied gently, her face flushing with pride.

"I am glad," she added gratefully, "that you brought me with you, for I would not have missed this sight for anything."

As they advanced into the camp, they were able to see and appreciate the decorum and discipline which prevailed everywhere; and when they neared groups of soldiers, some of whom were reclining upon the ground, the latter would rise and stand silently and respectfully aside. It was a striking contrast to the slovenly and insolent rabble of the Imperialist troops by whom foreigners are at all times grossly insulted and often cruelly maltreated.

On arriving at headquarters an officer came forward and, deferentially taking Montrose's card, asked him and his companion to wait while he saw his chief.

He almost immediately re-appeared and, with deep obeisances, held aside a large curtain, which covered the entrance of the tent, and asked them to enter.

As they stepped forward they saw before them a raised dais covered with crimson cloth, and upon it, seated beneath a canopy and surrounded by richly-dressed chieftains, was Cheng, who now rose and—while his compatriots remained standing—came quickly forward with hands outstretched.

"This is indeed a greater pleasure to me than any victory!" he said, grasping both their hands at the same time and exhibiting much emotion.

Montrose handed him the despatch from Dr. Sen, and in a few words explained how he had met Luh-hwa and that she was now his wife.

"This has been ordered by God, and I bless you both!" said Cheng with much feeling, gently and fondly raising his sister, who, according to

custom, had fallen upon her knees before the first-born male of her house.

Montrose gave a start of surprise and stepping forward impulsively grasped his hand.

"Cheng, you are a Christian!"

"I am a sinner striving to be worthy of that blessed name," Cheng replied with modesty. "That holy book you gave me has been my comfort and consolation through years of sorrow and hardship."

"Then, thank God," exclaimed Montrose, "my mission has not been in vain!"

Cheng now led the way into an inner chamber and gave them seats.

When they were alone Luh-hwa took from her pocket a carefully-wrapped packet, and drew from it a small roll of paper which she handed to her brother.

"This is dear mother's last letter to you," she said, adding simply and apologetically, "I have kept it for years, as I was unable to deliver it before."

Cheng bowed his head and his hand trembled as he respectfully received the time-worn missive; and, while he eagerly and sorrowfully bent over it, Montrose regarded him with silent interest.

He had grown taller, and his erect and graceful form was shown to great advantage in a long and gorgeous robe of yellow satin, which was covered with gold and silver embroidery, and drawn in round the waist by a chain-linked belt, from which was suspended a sabre of beautiful workmanship. He was wearing the state dress of the Ming dynasty, and upon his head was a scarlet hood surmounted by a band of beaten gold, ornamented

with filigree work, and with jewels consisting of large pearls and rubies, all of which had been left him by his deceased father, and had been placed in the casket which he had contrived to recover from its hiding-place in the grounds of his old home in Lien.

His face, though more handsome and expressive, was still youthful; yet it bore a look of stern and even gloomy determination, which was accentuated by his general aspect and bearing, which were commanding and somewhat haughty, while his manner was quiet, courteous, and self-reliant.

"Poor mother!" he at length said, in a low, thoughtful voice, folding the letter and placing it in his pocket.

Then for a moment his eyes flashed, and a grim smile played upon his countenance.

"I have not laboured in vain," he added, speaking slowly and distinctly, "for the day will soon come when the murderers of those dear ones, and all my clansmen, shall be brought to justice."

He now opened the despatch and read it carefully. Then, touching a small gong, he turned to Montrose.

"Just as you and my dear sister arrived," he said smilingly, "I was holding a council of war; and I am afraid that the news from Dr. Sen makes it necessary for me to at once confer with my generals. So will you honour us with your presence?"

Montrose assented. Then Cheng bent down and, laying his hand affectionately upon Luh-hwa's shoulder, said: "My dear sister, delighted though I am that we have been once more united, and although eager and impatient to have a long

conversation with you and learn the story of your adventures, I shall be obliged to leave you for the present, and also rob you for a time of your good husband's company, since important matters must be first attended to. However, as there happen to be some respectable women in camp I will send for them and see that you receive every attention."

The honest Ah Sam, who looked hale and happy, now entered and saluted those present with great respect and gratification. Cheng at once despatched him with an order for the high officers to assemble, while another man was deputed to find certain serving-women and to see that a banquet was spread.

Shortly afterwards a trumpet sounded loudly, and then, bowing to Luh-hwa, the two men passed out of the inner tent into the large one; and, as they did so, those assembled there rose to their feet.

"I must present to you my old tutor and adviser, Mr. Wong A-chih, whom I believe you have met before," said Cheng, leading Montrose to three raised seats near which stood a patriarchal-looking man who was dressed somewhat more soberly than the rest of the assemblage.

The old gentleman came forward with outstretched hand.

"I feel very gratified to meet you once again, sir," he said, grasping Montrose by the hand; "for it is many years since we met, and now we are on the eve of great events."

"Events which—if I remember right—you seemed to anticipate when last I saw you," said Montrose, cordially returning the pressure of his hand.

Cheng now raised his hand to enjoin silence, and in a few solemn words he announced the arrival of his beloved sister, and introduced "an old and respected friend who had recently done him the honour of becoming his brother-in-law." He then proceeded to read the message from Dr. Sen, and those present listened with silent attention.

His every look and gesture pronounced him to be a born leader of men; and the marked deference with which he was treated greatly pleased and impressed Montrose; and as he stood beside him and looked around upon that company of stern and warlike chieftains who seemed to consider it an honour to serve beneath the standard of this youthful warrior—this princely outcast—he felt proud to claim kinship with him, and, if needs be, to wield a sword in his cause.

After reading the despatch Cheng sat down for a few minutes and conferred with Montrose and Mr. Wong. Then turning to his officers he expressed his conviction that the best measure to pursue in this case was to endeavour by forced marches to reach and capture the city of Quei-ling before its garrison had been reinforced by the foreign and Imperialist troops.

"I deem this expedient for several reasons," he added. "In the first place, Quei-ling is a large city with stores of food, arms and ammunition, besides several cannon and three Krupp guns; so it would form a good base for our subsequent operations against Lien. In the second place, in order to better avail ourselves of the flank attack which Dr. Sen proposes to deliver in our support, I venture to think that it would be advisable to encounter the Imperialists in the open field; and

then we have a strong city to draw from or fall back upon, as the case may require."

The generals were unanimous in their opinion that this plan should be adopted; so Cheng gave orders for the camp to be struck at once, and for extra scouts to be sent out ahead of the army.

"We will now retire, my dear Montrose—my dear Herbert, I should say," he said, rising and intimating that the council was over.

Then turning to Mr. Wong, he added, "And you must come and help me to celebrate the great occasion of my reunion with a long-lost brother and sister."

"I shall be only too happy to do so," said the old gentleman, whose eyes shone with animation, as he took the arm which Montrose proffered him, and whispered, as they entered the inner enclosure, "We two (inclining his head towards Cheng) have wandered far together and I love him as a son, and have watched over him from his childhood. Long ago I knew that he would one day be a great man; and his sufferings must have been ordained by Providence that he might be chastened and fitted for the work he seems destined to accomplish. His noble heart must now be quickened with joy, for he has not only found you and his beloved sister, but is at last about to come face to face with that villainous tyrant who caused the downfall of his house and the death of his honourable parents. For Shun Ming, the former Taotai of Lien, is now Prefect of Quei-ling and the surrounding districts; and being now very wealthy and influential, and, probably having some knowledge and much fear of the danger which threatens

him, he petitioned the Viceroy of Canton to send the present expedition to his assistance.

"And there is yet another who will have to reckon with our host," he added, "and that is How Seng Wui, the Magistrate. He is still in Lien."

"And how long," asked Montrose, "has Cheng openly opposed the present government?"

"Nearly two years," replied Mr. Wong. "For some years he and I travelled from place to place, chiefly among the mountainous regions of the two Kwangs, preaching an anti-dynastic crusade; and, when the time was ripe for revolt, the hardy mountaineers rallied round our standard, and we attacked the city of Tou-chau, away to the westward beyond the Nanling mountains, and captured it, together with vast stores and treasures, among the former being some thousands of bales of fine cloth which enabled us to make uniforms for our troops, and other useful things, including tents.

"In most of our encounters with the cowardly Imperialists we have been singularly successful; and now, having an army of hardy, disciplined men, we mean to wrench Southern China from the Manchu-Tartars, and establish an independent State. Messengers have been despatched to all parts of Kwang-si and Kwang-tung, and from the most distant places men are now coming to fight with us for life and liberty."

Montrose continued for some time in conversation with Mr. Wong, while Cheng sat and talked with his sister; and then a servant announced that the meal was prepared.

Passing through a canvas-covered passage they entered another smaller tent where an oval table, covered with red cloth, was spread with good fare.

Luh-hwa's face was bright and animated, and she seemed to thoroughly enjoy herself; and she was waited upon by two Cantonese women who did their utmost to make her comfortable, while Cheng and Mr. Wong vied with each other in giving her and her husband a warm welcome. Toasts were drank and little speeches made; but while this merry-making was in progress there could be heard outside the clatter of hoofs, the rumble of gun-carriages, and the tramp of many feet, and other sounds which showed that speedy preparations were being made for the onward march.

On rising from the table Cheng held aside a canvas flap, and as they stepped out upon the soft grass an inspiring sight met their gaze. The city of tents had disappeared as if by magic and in its place soldiers were loading and harnessing horses, or forming in line. Yet there was no undue bustle or confusion, and each man seemed to know his duty and to perform it quietly and methodically, and our friends stood together for some time watching the work that was being carried on.

When the various dispositions had been made, and the regiments marshalled, Cheng gave a searching glance around and then issued a command to a staff-officer who stood near. Immediately afterwards a trumpet sounded, and the call was answered from all parts of the field. In a moment the earth seemed to tremble as line upon line and brigade after brigade of armed men swung past them at a quick march.

"Now we will start!" said Cheng, as Ah Sam appeared leading their horses, and a number of

men who composed his staff and bodyguard came riding up.

They now mounted and proceeded on their way, Montrose riding beside Cheng, and Luh and Mr. Wong following close behind. Montrose noticed that above the sea of heads which surrounded them only a few horsemen were to be seen, and he asked his companion what had become of all the cavalry.

"This is to be a forced march," replied Cheng, "and, until getting in touch with the enemy, cavalry and infantry fare alike; all the horses, with the exception of those belonging to the generals, scouts, and a small part of my bodyguard, being requisitioned for transport purposes. Each man carries a bag of rice, a bottle of water and his weapon, and the animals carry the rest. Being unencumbered with waggons, we are able to make double the amount of progress that an ordinary army would under similar conditions.

"You will also observe," he added, "that certain regiments and battalions are armed differently to others. The reason of this is that we have accumulated a very miscellaneous assortment of arms, so I thought that it would be advisable for the best marksmen to have the newest and most accurate weapons. For instance the men of one regiment or battalion carry Martini-Henri rifles, those of another Snyders, and so on; and in order to avoid dissension among them, all those who are armed alike go together."

After a time Cheng dropped behind to converse with his sister; so Mr. Wong joined Montrose, who learned much from him respecting the modes of attack and retreat.

That evening they camped near a small stream, after traversing about thirty miles of flat country, and were joined by three hundred men from a neighbouring village, also by some men from the Meling mountains. They were now only twenty-eight miles from Quei-ling, so a final council of war was held at 8 p.m., all the high officers being present, also Montrose, who was dressed in a plain khaki uniform with his revolvers on his belt.

It was agreed that the western wall was to be bombarded with every available gun and then attacked in force. In the meantime a large body of mounted infantry was to work round to the north, keeping behind a range of foot-hills; and when the garrison was engaged in repulsing the attack from the west, they were to try and rush the northern part of the wall, which at that point was thickly overgrown with trees and bushes that would enable the stormers to climb with greater safety and expedition than would be possible if wholly dependent upon ladders.

Other details of the attack were arranged, and then Montrose—who had said little during the debate—rose to his feet and offered to lead the northern storming party. Whereupon Cheng stood up and in a few stirring and eloquent words expressed his sincere gratification; and unbuckling from his side a magnificent sabre with a curiously-wrought hilt of gold, he presented it to Montrose.

"Take this, my sword," he said with warm enthusiasm, "and I know that with it you will cleave a way to victory!"

The various generals now came forward and paid their respects to their "foreign brother," who was then formally installed as commander of the

Triad division of mounted infantry, which was chiefly composed of men belonging to one of the most ancient secret societies in China—men whose forefathers had fought and bled for the beloved Mings in their valiant struggles against the Manchoo invaders. They were a splendid and useful body of soldiers, and were armed with heavy Chinese swords and Snyder rifles, the latter being slung over the shoulder, while their uniform consisted of a red turban, a tight-fitting blue jacket with a leather belt round the waist, and loose red trousers that were gathered in above the ankle and tucked into the ordinary Chinese riding-boots.

At an early hour next morning the march was resumed, and Montrose rode at the head of his division; and it must be confessed that in his khaki uniform, and with his sabre and revolvers at his side, he looked every inch a soldier and very little of the missionary; while Luh-hwa and her attendants, who had been provided with sedan chairs—also the wives of certain chiefs—occupied a place in the centre of the army where they were well guarded in case of any sudden attack.

Nothing of any importance happened that day, and at six o'clock in the evening the army encamped about four miles to the westward of Quei-ling. Every precaution was taken against a surprise, and, besides the usual outposts, the front, flanks, and rear were guarded by rifle-pits and trenches.

At 8 p.m. one of Cheng's spies brought in the news that Shun Ming had strongly fortified the city and had gathered into it all the forces he could collect from the surrounding country; and that a

Tartar general, named Hop Foi, had been intrusted with the defence.

Cheng smiled grimly and contemptuously as he heard these tidings, but he did not impart them to his generals, or summon them to another council of war. For his mind was resolved, and his plan of action definitely arranged, and he wished officers and men to sleep well and soundly that night; for on the morrow there would be much work and great doings.

Being a wary commander he refrained from making the attack by night, as he did not know the full strength of the garrison, though he was sure that the relief expedition was nowhere near, for his scouts had scoured the surrounding country for many miles.

At half-past four in the morning the *réveille* sounded. Horn and trumpet echoed the brazen call; and soon the camp was up and stirring. The various generals and company commanders paraded their men for inspection, and before ammunition was served out every weapon was examined to see that it was in good order. Each soldier carried his kit, as the mounted regiments now required the horses.

The Triad division under Montrose, mustering 2,625 fighting men, was the first to leave camp, as it was to form the northern storming party, and had to make a somewhat wide detour to the northward.

At a quarter to six the main army, or *Keun*, which was composed of about 41,000 officers and men, marched out in separate divisions formed in columns of six abreast, the flanks being protected by cavalry and artillery, and the front by a widely

extended screen of skirmishers and a couple of quick-firing guns. Each division was divided into five brigades—the front, rear, right, left and centre—and a brigade was divided into five regiments, each of which had its own particular banner, the latter varying in size according to the prowess and reputation of those serving beneath it. Cheng's bodyguard consisted of two thousand stalwart Maoutsze men, all of whom were aboriginal mountaineers and natives of Kwang-si, who were conspicuous for their bravery and hardihood, and for their long and beautiful hair.

After half an hour's quick march the army passed over some rising ground, and the city of Quei-ling came into full view about two miles distant. The walls were lined with soldiery, whose arms and many-coloured banners made a grand display in the bright sunlight of early morning; and as the garrison caught sight of the insurgent forces, two puffs of smoke were seen and two shells screamed through the air and burst on the left flank.

A halt was now made and great stillness prevailed as Cheng, accompanied by his staff, rode through the lines and addressed the men. Then the whole army knelt upon the ground and chanted a martial hymn, after which the brigades were deployed for the attack.

The first storming party consisted of two thousand Hunan men armed with revolvers, small oval-shaped shields and keen-bladed Japanese swords; and these were accompanied by a party of trench-diggers, who were similarly armed, but carried between them broad and lengthy ladders. They were to advance in extended order, supported

by artillery and two brigades of infantry armed with rifles. The rest of the army was divided into first and second reserves, while four regiments of cavalry and four of infantry were held in readiness to cut off a retreat, or meet a sortie from any of the gates.

Several field-batteries, each composed of six, nine, and fifteen-pounders, were now dragged to the front and opened fire with canister and shrapnel. They were promptly answered from the walls by three nine-pounder Krupp guns and other cannon which made a tremendous noise and would have wrought terrible havoc had they been well served.

While this artillery duel was proceeding the invaders gradually crept forward, sometimes lying down to avoid shell fire and never failing to take advantage of any cover which the irregularities of the ground afforded; and although round-shot and shell screamed over them and sometimes burst in their midst, and bullets spattered the ground and threw up clouds of dust, they doggedly moved on, carefully reserving their fire for close range.

Suddenly a trumpet-call rang out, and with a wild and fierce shout the Hunan "braves," who formed the front centre, and the stalwart men of Kwang-si and Kwang-tung, on the right and left of them, rose up and in the face of a terrible fusillade swept forward to the assault.

Many a brave fellow bit the dust, though often one would scramble to his feet and stagger on a few yards until he dropped from loss of blood; while others would lie where they fell and fire at the enemy until their life or their supply of

cartridges was exhausted. A considerable part of the wall near the western gate had been partly battered down, and this was the spot selected for the main attack.

As is the case with many ancient cities in China, the moat was dried up and nearly filled with heaps of refuse; so the brave trench-diggers rushed ahead and in spite of bullets, stones and stink-pots, planted their ladders against the wall, and up swarmed the men of Hunan. The slaughter was terrible, but as one man dropped over the head of his comrades, another would take his place, the rungs of each ladder being so broad that four men could ascend it abreast.

* * * * *

We will now follow the movements of Montrose and his division of mounted infantry. After leaving camp, they rode to the northward until well behind a range of low, tomb-covered hills, which were situated about one mile and a half to the northward of Quei-ling and crossed it transversely from east to west. Being now completely hidden from the enemy's view, they proceeded slowly and cautiously to the westward, while the scouts were spread out ahead like a fan, a number of them skirting the northern brow of the hill. Presently the sound of heavy ordnance showed that the main attack had commenced in earnest.

They had gained a point which was nearly on a level with the city, when from the heights above they heard a shot fired and saw a couple of scouts galloping towards them.

"By the right, wheel into line!" cried Montrose;

and when this manœuvre was carried out he halted the division. Before the nearest scout could reach them a large force of Tartar cavalry topped the crest of the hill and, in full career, came thundering towards them down the slope. But suddenly they slackened speed, and after a time stopped, as if undecided how to act. But Montrose was not one to waver, and he knew that time was precious and that now was the moment to strike. Drawing his sabre he gave his adjutant a command, and, as the charge was sounded, he put spurs to his horse and dashed up the hillside followed by the whole division.

The very ground seemed to tremble as squadron after squadron crashed after their intrepid leader, whose flashing blade was soon dyed with the blood of many a northern foeman as he ploughed through the surging mass which was soon rent in a hundred places, whole lanes of dead and dying men and horses marking the passage of those warlike southerners.

Having cut through and demoralised the enemy—though not without some loss—Montrose did not allow his men to wheel about and continue the fight, but kept them in full career down the southern incline, as he noticed that the wall in front of them was almost unprotected, the defenders having been called away to repulse the main attack which was proceeding with great fury.

When about half a mile from the city, he halted two squadrons and left them behind to hold the Tartar cavalry in check in case they should return to harass his rear. He and his force had got to within five hundred yards of the wall before any attempt was made to adequately guard that

vulnerable point. Then a number of soldiers were seen hurrying round the parapet.

"Forward!" cried Montrose, urging on his steed. "We must be there first!"

Riding up to the moat which was filled with *débris*, they quickly dismounted, and left the horses in charge of two troopers who were instructed to return with them to the shelter of the squadrons left behind.

With revolver in hand, Montrose sprang to the wall, which he quickly scaled by means of vines, branches and broken brickwork, followed with cat-like agility by his men.

He had nearly gained the top when a huge stone came crashing down, carrying with it three of the gallant stormers, one of whom was crushed to death. Then a man peered over the battlement and was in the act of swinging a two-handed sword above his head, when Montrose fired his revolver, killing him instantly and clearing the way.

Springing upon the parapet he was just in time to encounter the foremost band of defenders as they came dashing up with swords, spikes and rifles. One gigantic Shan-si brave fired point-blank at him, but, being too much excited to take steady aim, he missed his mark, and in return received a bullet through the head.

It must be confessed that the Imperialists fought with stubborn ferocity; and Montrose and four other troopers had for a few moments—while covering the ascent of their supporters—to fight against heavy odds. As each man gained the top of the wall he joined in the fray, and for some minutes the fighting was close and deadly. At

last, however, the enemy gave way, and Montrose led his men round to the west where the conflict was now raging at its fiercest.

Time after time the main attack had been repulsed, the stormers having been hurled back and suffocated with stink-pots and other deadly missiles; but now Montrose was able to bring an enfilading fire to bear upon the enemy, and at last the insurgents gained a footing upon the wall. With fierce shouts they swarmed over the battlements, and, led by Montrose and other generals, swept down into the city, driving the panic-stricken Imperialists before them.

The slaughter was great, and those who turned and faced their pursuers died to a man. But many threw down their arms, and, imploring mercy, expressed their willingness to join the insurgent ranks. These were taken prisoners and carefully guarded until they had taken the oath of allegiance, which was a particularly solemn and binding one.

Montrose did not see Cheng until about two hours after the fall of the city, and then they met outside the Prefect's yamen.

The latter at once came forward and extended both his hands.

"I thank you with all my heart!" he exclaimed earnestly, "for, had it not been for your timely aid, I much doubt whether we should have been able to effect an entrance to the city, at least for some hours. As it is, our casualties amount to about eight hundred killed and wounded."

"A heavy price, indeed," said Montrose; "but have you captured Shun Ming?"

"We have!" said Cheng with solemn emphasis.

"While endeavouring to escape by the west gate with his family and retinue, he was surrounded by a detachment of cavalry and, after a fierce fight, was taken prisoner. He will be tried and sentenced this very afternoon."

The insurgent army, with the exception of Cheng's bodyguard and the Triad division commanded by Montrose, camped about a mile to the eastward of the city, this being deemed expedient to avoid the possibility of any looting and to hold the troops in a fit and ready condition to meet the advancing relief expedition of which news was hourly expected.

The few ladies accompanying the insurgent army were provided with a suitable suite of apartments at the rear of the yamen, which was a spacious and magnificent building; and thither Montrose repaired to find Luh-hwa anxiously awaiting him; for she had been fearful lest he had met with some mishap during the conflict.

"I am indeed thankful that you are unhurt," she said, looking gladly and proudly up into his face, and laying her head against his arm as he caressed her.

The women in attendance soon provided them with a meal, to which they did ample justice, particularly Montrose, who felt hungry after his exertions; but they had barely completed it when an officer arrived with a letter from Cheng requesting the presence of his brother-in-law at the trial of Shun Ming, which was to take place in the reception-hall.

Montrose at once made his way to that apartment, where he found all the generals assembled in solemn conclave, their leader occupying the seat

of honour on the dais. As he entered Cheng came forward and led him to a place beside himself and near Mr. Wong who looked very grave and agitated.

It was an impressive sight. Around the chamber, which was embellished with scrolls, tapestry, and valuable porcelain vases, stood Cheng's body-guard of Maoutsze men, dressed in red turbans and trousers and blue jackets with yellow facings. In front of them were tiers of seats occupied by the various high officers in their magnificent robes of silk; while opposite the tribunal, which was covered by a canopy, was an open space extending to the end of the chamber at the entrance of which stood two guards with drawn swords.

All being present, Cheng made a signal, and a large gong sounded. Immediately afterwards the two immense folding-doors at the end of the apartment were thrown open, and the former Tao-tai of Lien was brought in under a strong guard and in chains, and was made to kneel before the tribunal. He had been allowed to dress himself in his official robes, and his cruel and crafty face bore an expression of ill-affected unconcern; but as he darted venomous glances here and there and saw the stern, relentless gaze of his judges fixed upon him, his bitter chagrin and dejection became more and more apparent, and was accentuated by his uneasy movements.

A former citizen of Lien, who had once been a victim to the prisoner's greed and treachery, and who now commanded a brigade of insurgent cavalry, opened the proceedings by reading out a detailed account of the trial of Mr. Hung Fong and his cousin Hung Hoi. Then Mr. Wong, in a

voice shaken with emotion, related all he knew of the matter and gave a touching account of his last interview with his old friend and patron.

Those around seemed deeply impressed with the tragic story; but Shun Ming nervously snapped his eyes and darted vindictive glances at the aged witness; and now and again he interrupted him by denying his assertions and endeavouring to throw the blame upon his old colleague, How Seng Wui, the magistrate. He strove hard to exonerate himself, but the evidence was overwhelmingly damning, and at length he pleaded for mercy.

Suddenly Cheng, who until now had remained silent, rose from his seat and, drawing himself up to his full height, pointed towards the prisoner.

"Is this man guilty?" he asked.

"He is!" came the unanimous reply.

"Then it is only right that his life should be forfeited, for he is the murderer of my father."

"It is just," was the response; and for some moments dead silence ensued. Then, in a solemn and even compassionate voice, Cheng addressed the condemned man, whose head was now bowed.

"Shun Ming," he said, "having solemnly sworn never to rest until I had avenged the unjust and untimely death of my honourable father, I must now fulfil my oath. My conscience acquits me in this matter, since I am only acting in strict accordance with the law of all civilized nations. You are a murderer and your guilt has been proven beyond doubt; therefore you must die. But I will spare you the shame and humiliation of being publicly executed, by permitting you to carry out the sentence yourself. Four hours will be allowed you wherein to prepare yourself for the

end, and to take leave of your family, for whom I feel the deepest commiseration; and you may rest assured that I shall see that each member of it is adequately provided for and protected, though, of course, the bulk of your estate will be confiscated."

The prisoner was now removed. But just as he was being led from the chamber, and the court was about to retire, a lady, followed by several female attendants, came in and prostrated herself before the tribunal; and, although some years had passed since they had last met, Cheng saw at a glance that it was Ah Leen.

Hers was not a personality to be easily forgotten, and, in spite of her face being now pale and haggard, she appeared more beautiful than of old.

"Sir, I come to plead for my father," she said, bowing her head to the ground.

"Oh, be merciful and forgive him!" she entreated: "spare his life! spare his life!" And the serving-women echoed her petition and beat their heads upon the ground.

Cheng stood up, and it was apparent that he was struggling with great emotion; and his face betrayed the ordeal through which he was passing.

"My heart goes out to you," he answered, speaking sadly and earnestly, and excitedly passing his hand across his brow: "but I cannot, no, I cannot, grant your request, for I had sworn, by the gods, to avenge my father's death, and the sentence has been justly passed.

"But owing to my regard for you," he added, in a deep hoarse voice, "I have spared your father the degradation of being publicly executed; and he will die as my poor father died."

"Oh, have mercy and spare his life," she

persistently pleaded, raising her tearful, agonised face imploringly to his.

"Dear lady, my own life I could give, but not his," he replied, stepping from the dais and with outstretched hands advancing to assist her to rise.

But she anticipated this courteous act, and with flashing eyes and all the fierce impulsiveness of the Eastern woman, jumped to her feet and, violently striking her breast, fled from his presence.

Cheng turned sadly away and, taking Montrose's arm, left the chamber.

"Her fate is indeed a cruel one: so is mine!" he said; and in his quavering voice there was a tone of infinite sorrow and tenderness, tempered with calm resignation.

That day Shun Ming strangled himself in one of the private rooms of the yamen, and his body was treated with all the respect due to his rank: and thus ended the career of this inhuman and rapacious tyrant. Steps were at once taken to befittingly provide for his family; but, strange to say, poor Ah Leen suddenly disappeared from the city, and all efforts to find her proved futile.

CHAPTER XXIII

A GLORIOUS VICTORY

The fall of Quei-ling was of great importance to Cheng, as it gave him a firm footing in that part of the country; for besides capturing a vast amount of food, arms and treasure, hundreds of men flocked to his standard, and the news of his victory spread like wildfire through the province. He appointed one of his most trustworthy generals as Governor of the city, and took immediate steps to protect and encourage its trade.

On the morning of the third day after his entry into Quei-ling a party of mounted infantry, which had been out reconnoitring towards Kong-chin, brought in the news that an Imperialist army of about 30,000 men, with several batteries, was advancing from the south-east, and was about forty-two miles distant.

Cheng was sitting with Montrose and Mr. Wong in one of the apartments of the Prefect's yamen, which he had made his headquarters, when an aide-de-camp brought him this intelligence.

"And we will go forth and meet them," he said, turning to his companions; "for, thanks to the valuable assistance you and my staff have rendered

me, everything is in perfect order here, and we can afford to leave sufficient men behind to garrison the city, and to protect our lines of communication."

"It seems strange," observed Montrose, "that we have not again heard from Dr. Sen. I wonder what has become of him. Perhaps he has had some difficulty in raising sufficient men."

"Let us devoutly hope," said Mr. Wong, "that he has not come into collision with the Imperialist force and met with a serious reverse."

Since his last sad interview with Shun Ah Leen, Cheng had been unusually dejected, and his peremptory refusal to accede to her heart-rending appeal for mercy in behalf of her father, seemed to prey upon his mind; for his deep regard for her had nowise abated, and her sudden disappearance caused him grave anxiety. However, there was now little time for him to indulge in sorrowful meditation, as a great battle was impending, and he threw his whole energy into the task before him.

Exactly five hours after news of the enemy had been received, the insurgent army started on its march, the mounted men, with the exception of Cheng's bodyguard and Montrose's division, which occupied the centre, guarding the front and flanks, while the artillery took up positions on the right and left centre and rear. It was a magnificent sight to see those smart, well-disciplined troops sweep forward at a quick march, with their banners waving and their arms shining.

As Montrose admiringly cast his eyes over this great and well-ordered host, he marvelled at Cheng's untiring energy—at his natural capacity for organisation, and his remarkable abilities as a military leader.

He and Cheng had endeavoured to prevail upon Luh-hwa to remain behind in the city until after the battle ; but she refused to be separated from them, and was accommodated with a comfortable sedan-chair and a special guard of Maoutsze men, her female attendants also travelling in similar conveyances ; and now and again either her husband or brother would ride up and exchange a few words with her.

That evening the army encamped in a fertile valley, with its right wing resting upon the river Eta ; and at eleven o'clock, being a clear moonlight night, two regiments of cavalry were sent forward to make a reconnaissance. Next morning at five o'clock the march was resumed, the route lying across flat country, with the river on the right and high hills to the left. Throughout the day nothing of importance happened, and at 7 p.m. the camp was pitched on some rising ground which commanded a good view of the surrounding country.

At eight o'clock that night a galloper brought in news that the enemy was encamped on the western bank of the Tiao-kiang, about twenty-five miles distant, in three large divisions, one of which was partly composed of foreign troops.

Some of the insurgent officers had made a careful survey of the country ahead, and they had furnished their leader with a very useful map which he had studied carefully. On receiving information as to the whereabouts of the Imperialist forces, he determined to hurry his army forward and, if possible, take up a strong position some fourteen miles to the south-west. So at 4 a.m. the trumpets sounded, and in a short time the city of tents had disappeared, and, by the light of the

moon, the rebel hosts rolled forward, wave upon wave, like a mighty flood.

Silently, swiftly and doggedly those brave Southerners marched to the fray; and as day dawned and the sun rose in a clear, blue sky, a long stretch of flat, grassy country was revealed. To the right was the river Eta, winding away to the southward like a stream of molten silver; and to the left, about five miles distant, was a lofty hill which was called Temple Mount from the fact that a ruined temple crowned the summit; and from this hill the battle subsequently took its name.

Towards this eminence Montrose and his whole division, also three batteries of artillery, had already been despatched with orders to seize and hold it at all costs; and it was evident that he had reached it in safety, for Cheng observed through his field-glasses a large yellow flag flying from its summit. This was a signal which had been pre-arranged to show that the enemy was in sight, and, on seeing it, Cheng caused the whole army to move forward at the double.

The mounted patrols soon began to fall back upon the main body, and shortly afterwards, as some rising ground was reached, the Imperialist forces came into view about two miles away. They had already halted and were deploying for battle, and their front extended about nine miles.

Cheng at once despatched some regiments of cavalry to make a reconnaissance in force; and, after drawing upon themselves a somewhat heavy fire, they returned and reported that the enemy's right rested upon a small village about one mile to the south-east of Temple Mount, while their left rested upon the river.



The Imperialist army had been split up into four large divisions, in front of which were two lines of skirmishers. To the east were several brigades of southern infantry and five squadrons of cavalry, supported by six batteries of horse artillery, three of which had opened fire on Table Mount. To the west, against the river, were Tartar infantry and cavalry with four field batteries; while the centre was composed of Tartar, French and Shansi troops, with long-range and quick-firing guns.

Trumpets now sounded and, as the insurgent army came to a standstill, Cheng's staff-officers could be seen dashing off to the various generals. Then lines of men wheeled to the right, and others to the left; while bodies of horsemen split up and cantered away to take up the different positions assigned to them. And within an hour the army had been formed into two immense semi-circles, an eastern and a western one, both opening to the southward.

The left arm of the eastern arc was on a line with the centre of the enemy's eastern division, while its right one faced the open space between the enemy's centre and right wing; and the western semi-circle was similarly placed, only on the other side of the field. These arcs were composed of infantry and mounted infantry, and in the centre of each was a large **M** with its outer arms inclining towards and resting upon the lower and inner side of the arc, this formation holding in reserve a large and extremely mobile force of mounted men. Upon the right and left quarters of each semicircle were two field-batteries, and between these two great divisions were large bodies of cavalry; and opposed to the enemy's centre

was a large force of infantry drawn up in the form of an inverted V.

When the insurgent army was ready for action, Cheng rode to the front of it and proudly gazed upon that warlike host ; and as he did so, and those hardy warriors saw their beloved leader, they raised their voices and gave a mighty shout. He was clad in a jacket of shining mail with a yellow-coloured satin tunic over it, and a long under-garment of deep orange-coloured silk.

Just as he was turning to give an order, a horseman was seen galloping towards him from the south-east. The man had evidently been riding hard, for his animal was bespattered with foam ; but he did not decrease his furious pace until he drew rein beside Cheng and handed him a despatch, which the latter at once tore open and read. It was from Dr. Sen, who wrote thus :—

TO HUNG FONG CHENG,

Leader of Insurgent Forces.

I much regret that I have been unable to communicate with you sooner but I have been unavoidably delayed. My force, which numbers four thousand seven hundred irregulars, is now twelve miles to the southward of the Imperialist army and is hastening to your support. Yesterday I fought a rear-guard action with a considerable force of Tartar cavalry which had been despatched from Lien to assist the troops now opposed to you. After a heavy engagement, in which my losses amounted to eighty-four killed and wounded, I succeeded in thoroughly routing them. I have with me one field-howitzer and three-twelve pounder smooth-bore guns of an obsolete pattern. My men can be easily distinguished by you, as they all wear white conical-shaped straw hats with a white feather on the top. Awaiting your instructions.—I am, etc.,

SEN FA TAI.

Leader of the Chinese Reform Party.

Having perused this message, Cheng took from his clothing a pocket-book, and, tearing out a leaf, wrote the following message :—

TO DR. SEN FA TAI,

Leader of Reform Party.

Many thanks for your esteemed despatch just received, the contents of which I have attentively noted. I am now going into action, and shall endeavour to isolate the enemy's right and left and then attack his centre, which is very strong, being chiefly composed of foreign troops with artillery. If you can manage to support me by delivering a vigorous rear attack upon the two central divisions, I shall feel deeply obliged. Thanking you for your welcome aid and sympathy—I am, &c.,

HUNG FONG CHENG.

Calling one of his staff-officers, he ordered him to convey the despatch to Dr. Sen without delay; while the hard-ridden galloper who had brought the message gave him full directions as to route and distance, and then went to the rear to partake of some refreshment before returning to his commander.

It was evident that the position held by Montrose was being fiercely attacked, for the roar of artillery was incessant, and Cheng could see through his glasses that large bodies of troops were in conflict upon the western slope of the hill.

Now the sound of many gongs made weird music, and when it ceased every man in the insurgent army fell upon his knees and raised his eyes and hands Heavenward, and above the distant thunder of guns rose the murmur of a great multitude as the rebel hosts sang their battle-hymn of praise and prayer.

Then trumpets sounded and echoed the sound,

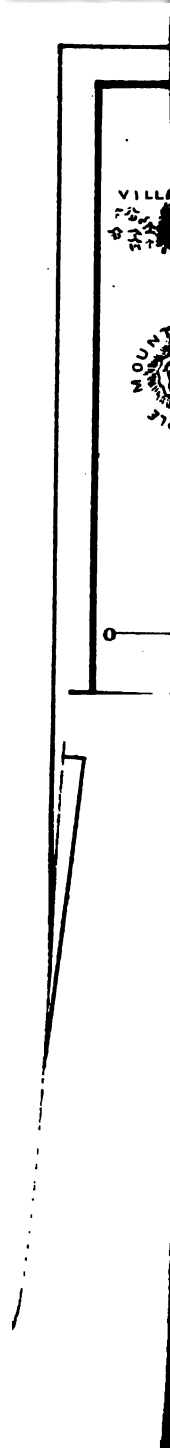
and forward to the fray swung the brave Southerners, every man in his place and every file in perfect formation.

The enemy now opened fire, and shrapnel burst above the insurgents and rained death upon them, while forty-pound shells and chain-shot tore up the ground and scattered man and beast upon the field; but directly anyone fell a comrade would briskly step into his place, and onward through the leaden storm swept the great semi-circles and the cavalry. The artillery then went forward, and, unlimbering a mile ahead, pumped shell and canister into the central French and Chinese batteries, one of which was eventually silenced, while some of the Tartar gunners fled from their posts after many had been shot down.

When about one thousand two hundred yards distant from the enemy, Cheng threw out the right arm of the **M** of the western arc, and the left arm of that of the eastern one, and commenced a vigorous feint attack upon his opponent's right and left; while a large body of infantry engaged the centre, merely manœuvring in order to hold in check the foreign legions, which were the strongest, until the two wings had been dealt with.

In the meantime Montrose and his force were hotly engaged, and a concentrated cannonade was maintained against his position; while assault after assault was met and frustrated by the steadiness of the Triad men, who constructed lines of trenches upon the side of the hill from which they kept up a steady and accurate fire upon the enemy, although the slope was continually spattered with shell, shrapnel, chain-shot, bullets and fire-darts.

About two hours after the commencement of the





battle the attacking arms of the two semi-circles suddenly and simultaneously fell back, as if in full retreat; and with blood-thirsty yells the enemy's right and left were hurled forward in pursuit. But as the opposing arm of each arc receded, the opposite one was thrown forward, so as to gradually envelop the enemy and cut him off from his central divisions; and, as each side retreated, its quarter battery was unmasked and opened fire at close range and with deadly effect.

Seeing the Imperialists outmanœuvred, the French General endeavoured to render them assistance and to effect a junction with them by turning and throwing out his wings and sending large bodies of irregular cavalry to try and cut through the enfolding arcs. But Cheng at once reversed the formation of the central brigades of infantry, so that two arms spread out on either hand to harass the French flanks, while a sufficient force was retained to continue the frontal attack. At the same time the three Krupp guns, which had been captured at Quei-ling, were trained with other ordnance on the Foreign and Tartar horsemen.

The battle now raged with great fury, particularly to the eastward, where Montrose was holding Temple Mount against determined assaults and a continuous cannonade. Directly the Imperialist infantry pressed forward past his position after the retiring insurgents, he despatched two of his squadrons to make a flank attack; but a superior force of Tartar cavalry suddenly came to the support of their comrades and with great bravery hurled themselves into the midst of their assailants against whom a heavy fire was also directed from three field-howitzers placed about a mile

and a half to the southward. Moreover, the commander in charge of the enemy's advancing infantry detached a couple of his regiments, which spread out on either side of the cavalry, firing volley after volley into the Triad squadrons, which at one time seemed in imminent peril of being entirely annihilated. So hard were they pressed that the men began to lose heart and to fall back in some confusion; and Montrose knew that it was quite out of the question for him to send any of his force to their assistance, for it was now all that he could do to hold his own against the fierce and frequent attacks which were directed against his position, which was one of vast importance, particularly since he was able to direct from it a heavy fire upon almost any part of the field where it might be required.

Suddenly, however, and with reckless daring, a young subaltern—a mere boy—spurred to the front of the broken and wavering squadrons, and, flourishing his sabre, plunged headlong into the advancing foe. Fired by his dauntless example, his men rallied, and, with a mighty shout of defiance, hurled themselves forward in his wake, and horses and riders fell before their resistless charge. Ahead of them rode their gallant leader, who seemed to bear a charmed life, for he was surrounded on all sides by desperate and well-armed foes through whom he simply cleaved a way for himself, smiting right and left, and at each cut dyeing his blade with Tartar blood.

"Gallant fellow!" exclaimed Montrose, as he watched the exploit; and turning to one of his officers he asked the name of this youthful warrior, whom he intended to recommend for promotion.

To his surprise he learned this his name was Tai Sun Hwai, and that he was the younger brother of Tai Mo-kwah, the unfortunate student who had heroically died with his father at Kowloon some years previously.

"He is indeed taking heavy toll," remarked Montrose, as he watched the encounter.

At length the Tartar horsemen gave way, and so terrible had been the slaughter that a regular panic ensued, and those who were not killed or captured fled for their lives to the shelter of the nearest battery. The French general who commanded the mixed troops forming the enemy's centre handled his men with such consummate skill, and fought with such stark obstinacy, that Cheng's strategic powers were taxed to their utmost to avert disaster; and as the day wore on and the fight waxed fiercer, he began to look anxiously forward to the coming of Dr. Sen and his levies.

However, after several hours of fierce fighting, the advanced sections of the eastern division of the Imperialist army were utterly defeated, and, breaking, fled in disorder to some distant hills on their right; but the western division fought with the desperation of despair, for its front and flanks were hedged in, and in its rear lay the deep waters of the River Eta.

The French commander now turned his whole attention to the relief of this isolated body, and at four o'clock in the afternoon, when all the insurgent reserves had been called out and were actively engaged in various parts of the field, a furious attempt was made to break through the western crescent, against which four batteries were brought to bear, while several brigades of infantry

and cavalry were launched at its weakest point, led by the bravest Foreign and Chinese officers.

At the point attacked a gap was soon made by the heavy artillery fire brought to bear against it, and a strong force of cavalry then wedged itself into this opening and succeeded in dividing the upper and lower parts of the left arm of the western semi-circle. So the latter at once fell back and spread out towards the river, half of the men facing outwards and the other half inwards; the one endeavouring to beat off the attack, and the other to more closely invest the enemy's separated division.

It was a critical moment, and Cheng saw that the fate of his army and his cause hung in a slender balance. After conferring for a few moments with Mr. Wong, he gave an order and, drawing his sword, rode to the head of his devoted bodyguard. Then a trumpet sounded loudly, and that splendid body of horsemen moved out at a canter and was soon thundering across the battle-field, with banners waving and sabres flashing, led by that fearless chief and by that hoary warrior who meant to live and die beside the cherished child of his adoption, the star of his life's great hope.

Right into the midst of the French and Tartar cavalry crashed the flower of the insurgent army, and a fierce hand-to-hand encounter ensued, men and horses falling to the ground and friend and foe becoming inextricably mixed in that surging mass.

Suddenly a bugle note rang out above the din of battle, and the French and their allies fell back and, under the cover of their guns, commenced retreating in a south-easterly direction, leaving many of their wounded behind. The cause of this

movement was at once made apparent by the appearance of a large body of armed men advancing at the double on the enemy's left rear, and Cheng at once knew that Dr. Sen had arrived; and it was evident that the latter was riding at the head of the approaching force, part of which had already been despatched to join in the pursuit of the Foreign and Tartar legions.

Cheng was reforming his scattered bodyguard and giving orders for a general advance upon the remaining portion of the Imperialist army, when from behind the retreating foe there dashed towards him a solitary horseman who carried a drawn sword and wore a Tartar helmet which concealed the upper part of his face. He had a slim and youthful form, and his shoulders were enveloped in a loose, richly-embroidered mantle of red and gold.

Cheng was now some forty yards ahead of his column, so, seeing that the approaching stranger meant to engage him in single combat, he drew his sabre and, holding his bridle tightly in hand, wonderingly awaited the onslaught.

When within a few yards of him, his assailant curbed his steed and swerving to the left rode obliquely towards him so as to encounter his sword-arm, and then delivered a downward blow. This Cheng parried but did not return, for his horse shied away from his antagonist; the latter, however, wheeled round and attacked him fiercely though very clumsily, making no attempt to defend himself and seeming to court destruction.

Seeing that his adversary was a mere youth and unskilled in the use of the sword, Cheng called upon him to surrender, wishing to spare his life.

But the call was unheeded, and the attack was renewed with greater energy and recklessness.

The combat had lasted a few moments when, just as Cheng parried a blow and held the point of his sword at his opponent's breast to show that he was at his mercy, the latter suddenly flung himself forward upon it and, with a piercing cry, fell to the ground, mortally wounded. And as he fell his steel helmet dropped from his head and revealed to the victor the pale and beautiful face of Ah Leen.*

With a frenzied moan of sorrow Cheng sprang from his charger and, kneeling beside the dying girl, rested her head upon his arm, at the same time beckoning to one of his officers and telling him to have a tent brought from the rear and pitched at once. Then, taking from his pocket a flask of strong wine, he moistened her lips with it. A Chinese doctor now came and bound her wound; but in answer to Cheng's anxious inquiries as to whether there was any possibility of her recovering, he only shook his head and silently went out to attend to others, for the slaughter had been terrible.

After a time Ah Leen opened her eyes and, seeing who was bending over and supporting her, endeavoured to free herself from Cheng's embrace, though in doing so she must have suffered untold agony.

"Oh, pardon me, Ah Leen!" he cried in a voice

* Chinese history abounds in instances where women have gone into battle disguised as men, and have fought with great daring. In some cases these female warriors have risen to high military distinction. One of the most popular of these heroines was one Muk Lan, a young northern lady, who greatly distinguished herself in the Tang dynasty during the fierce struggles against the Mongol invaders; and she now figures in many plays and ballads.

of heart-broken anguish: "I would sooner have died than hurt you, and I had no idea who it was that attacked me so fiercely."

"I am glad!" she gasped, her eyes flashing and her breast heaving as she vainly tried to put his arm from her. "I meant you to kill me—I meant to die by your hand, for I knew that you did not love me, or you would have granted my petition."

"By the gods, Ah Leen," he said in a broken voice, his tears falling upon her, "I loved you then, and I love you now; but I could not break my oath nor yet my obligation to my father and my people."

She did not reply, but now lay passively in his arms, with her eyes fixed upon his; and while in this position, with the roar of battle around them, an officer hurriedly rode up and informed his chief that the French and Tartar forces were thoroughly routed and in full retreat, and that the western division of the Imperialist army was defeated and had surrendered, though some two hundred men had managed to escape by swimming across the river.

"Let the firing cease," replied Cheng in a hushed voice, holding up his hand to enjoin silence.

Soon afterwards a great stillness fell upon the insurgent army, for the men were worn and weary with long fighting, and most of them had lost a comrade; and though there was consolation in having gained a great victory, the wounded needed relief and the dead needed burial. Thus ended the battle of Temple Mount.

A tent was soon erected over Ah Leen and her distracted lover, in whose arms she still reclined while breathing her young life away; for now the passionate ebullition of her grief and jealousy had

given place to tenderer emotions and to the languor preceding death. The knowledge that she was after all really loved by him for whom she had so long yearned, seemed to pacify her mind and to give contentment to her last moments: and she also seemed to listen with surprise and rapture to his fervent expression of love and sorrow, and, while lingering upon them, to forget her pain and her close proximity to death.

In this manner those two unhappy lovers took leave of one another for the last time; and when Ah Leen had breathed her last Cheng knelt beside the body and wept and prayed. Then covering her face he stood up and, walking into the open air, was met by his adopted father, who had been anxiously waiting outside the tent.

"Do not grieve, my son," said Mr. Wong with paternal tenderness and solicitude. "Forget the past and look forward to the great events of the future; for a glorious victory is yours to-day—and may Heaven be thanked!"

"Yes, yes," said Cheng in a subdued passionate voice, looking sadly around over the battlefield upon which the shades of evening were falling, "I suppose it was the irony of my fate that just as I had won a great victory and had redeemed my pledge, I should slay with mine own hand the very being for whom my heart longed."

"Come, dear Ah-tin," said Mr. Wong, laying his hand gently upon his companion's arm, "Dr. Sen has been waiting to see you for some time, and we owe him our thanks for his timely aid."

Having given orders for the remains of Shun Ah Leen to be placed in a coffin and sent back to her relations at Quei-ling, Cheng went with Mr.

Wong to his own marquee, which had been set up, and there they found the energetic reform leader in conversation with Montrose, who had been slightly wounded in the left arm, which was in a sling.

That night a great banquet was given, all the insurgent officers being invited ; but Luh-hwa was the only lady present, and she seemed becomingly proud of her gallant husband and brother. But Cheng—although elated at his victory, which was of incalculable importance to the people of Southern China—was sad and reserved, and did not enter into the conversation with his usual zest and brilliancy ; and, as the cause of his sorrow gradually became known to his guests, their sympathy was delicately and respectfully implied.

Next morning, after a long and well-earned rest, the army started for Lien, and throughout the day hundreds of volunteers joined the ranks. For it soon became widely known that a great battle had been fought and won by the insurgents, and it gave the people new hope of freedom and fresh courage to support its cause.

Though no fighting of any importance took place on the march there was one skirmish, as the remnant of the French and Chinese force, assisted by the Tartar troops which Dr. Sen had dispersed, made a stand near a small village about twenty miles to the northward of Fou-chuen ; but, having lost all their guns save five, they were soon compelled to seek refuge in flight, and the victorious army was not again molested.

On the morning of the fifth day after the battle, Cheng once more sighted the ancient walls of his native place ; and many were the thoughts and

memories which now crowded into his mind as he rode forward at the head of that mighty host, in all the power and splendour of conquest. He was dressed in a long yellow robe of brocaded silk over which was a richly-embroidered jacket of pink satin; and upon his head he wore a vermillion-coloured hood, surmounted by a band of filigreed gold set with jewels; while the trappings of his charger were of burnished brass and yellow velvet worked with gold lace.

On his left side, and in striking contrast, rode Montrose, wearing a plain khaki uniform, and on the other, Dr. Sen; and behind them came Mr. Wong and Luh-hwa, attended by Ah-Sam, and followed by the staff and bodyguard; while on either hand and far behind marched the main army.

A flush of pride mantled Cheng's face as a great concourse of people, carrying flags and and banners accompanied by musicians, emerged from the west gate of the city and came forward to give him a hearty welcome; and in his memory he looked back over many years and recalled that memorable day when he had last approached those walls, and had looked wistfully toward them in the vain hope and expectation of seeing clansmen and citizens come forth to greet him as a victor.

The leading men of the city formed the head of the procession, and among them Cheng recognised the faces of many old friends and clansmen, all of whom treated him with marked homage and even affection. He soon learned that, on his approach, the troops garrisoning the city, also the officials, had hastily fled to the southward, and that How



Seng Wui had been arrested when trying to escape, and was awaiting judgment for the many crimes he had committed.

The great western gate was thrown wide open, and through it the multitude passed in grand array; and deafening roars of applause greeted Cheng as he slowly rode through the main street on his richly-caparisoned steed, and at length drew rein and dismounted in front of his old home, which he then entered in company with those nearest and dearest to him.

Speedy preparations had been made for his reception, and many of the women-folk and a few of the men, who had formerly served in the Hung family, were there to welcome the young heir back to his estate. And it was with deep emotion that he acknowledged the greetings of those faithful servants, and once more entered the halls and grounds which were endeared to him by so many fond recollections.

Luh-hwa also seemed deeply affected, and, smiling through her tears, she took her husband's hand and led him to the very window from which she had first seen him when he came to preach in the market-place; and as they again left the apartment they were met by Luh-hwa's former amah, the worthy Mrs. Lao, who, accompanied by her good husband, had come to pay her respects; and the poor woman seemed quite overcome with joy to find that, after all, her young mistress had married the kind foreigner whom she had befriended, and for whom she had delivered that keepsake which Luh-hwa still wore.

In the afternoon a solemn procession was formed, and Cheng went to the city temple and received

the tablets of his family from the chief priest. Then placing his late father's ring upon his finger he and his companions returned and restored the tablets to their original position in the Ancestral Hall, where a solemn thanksgiving service was held. Afterwards, he and his sister, also Montrose, Mr. Wong, and Dr. Sen visited various parts of the spacious grounds, particularly the spot where the precious casket had once been hidden, and then they had tea on the lawn.

The beautiful gardens had not been altered. The placid lake and smaller streams still gleamed in the near distance, with here a miniature island, and there a rustic bridge or quaint little fane; and these, with shady groves and fairy-like grottoes, brought back to the memory of our friends many bygone hallowed days and hours.

While sipping their tea Cheng entered into conversation with Dr. Sen, and Montrose sat hand-in-hand with his charming wife, chatting with her and dear old Mr. Wong upon whose kind and venerable countenance a smile of paternal pride rested as he told of past days and past struggles which he and the beloved son of his adoption had gone through together; and while he talked, and the sun went slowly down, he would now and again let his gaze rest upon Cheng's striking face, which bore an expression of calm and thoughtful contentment.

At some little distance apart from this family gathering stood the honest Ah Sam among a group of young officers in attendance; for he had just been promoted to the stewardship of the household, and, as a further recognition of his long and faithful services, had been given a com-

mission as lieutenant in his master's bodyguard ; so he was quite an important personage.

And now the time has come when we must take leave—at least for the present—of those old and intimate friends whose fortunes we have followed through so many changing scenes of life. At last we see them gathered together beneath the historic roof of the old home at Lien, with the star of the honourable house of Hung once more in the ascendant, and with the success of the great Southern Rebellion—of which we shall hear more latter on—practically assured by the genius, energy and courage of those to whom we now say *good-bye*.

I may mention that a beautiful Christian church was soon afterwards erected by Cheng in his native city in memory of his beloved father mother, and his fallen clansmen.

THE END





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